













WAR MEMOIRS  
*VOLUME II*

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# WAR MEMOIRS

OF

DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

*VOLUME II*

LONDON

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OF  
DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

VOLUME II

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# PREFACE

## TO

### VOLUME TWO\*

WITH this volume I finish my recollections of the War. They have taken the best part of my time for five years. The writing of books is a new business for me. When a man starts a new craft in his seventieth year he does not expect to gain that proficiency in the art which would enable him to become anything better than an amateur. It is as such I shall be ranked—it is as such I crave to be judged. I have sought to narrate facts as I remember them. I have given my impressions of events and personalities exactly as I found them at the time. Facts and impressions alike I have checked by a close examination and study of all available evidence, oral and written. I have revised impressions wherever I have found irrefutable proof that my memory was at fault, or that I was not in full possession of the facts when I formed those impressions. I have couched my narrative in such language as I can command to express my thoughts.

The only merit I claim for these volumes is that apart from the Official Histories of the War, they are the most carefully and richly documented account of the great Armageddon.

Official Histories deal in great detail with the battles fought; I have only undertaken to give an account of the struggle as I saw it from the standpoint of a Minister of the Crown. I was the only Minister in any country who had some share throughout the whole of the War in its direction. During the last two years I had much the largest share in the Ministerial direction of the resources of the British Empire. No other Minister in any of the belligerent countries held an official position from the 1st of August, 1914, to the 11th of November, 1918. King Albert, King George, the Kaiser and Poincaré were the only rulers who saw it through from the beginning to the end. Of these, Poincaré alone has given us an elaborate and detailed account of his contact with events during the War. For that reason his Diaries contain material of great value for the historian of the future. But he confines his story almost entirely to entries made by himself in his Diary whilst the War was in progress. There is no attempt at confirming and illuminating his version of events by quotations from contemporary documents. It is the necessity for

\* This Preface appeared in the original edition as the Preface to the sixth and last volume.

examining, collating and summarising an enormous collection of written material which has been responsible for the drudgery and labour of my last five years. To write a facile narrative drawn from vivid memories would not have taken me one-tenth of the time which these volumes have occupied.

The mass of papers accumulated by my secretaries during the period of the War and the subsequent peace negotiations filled me with dismay when I first entertained the thought of writing my War Memoirs. When I was engaged in an active political career as leader of a party I had neither the spare time nor the spare energy to undertake the gigantic toil of rummaging through this mountain of printed, typewritten or written memoranda, minutes, notes or letters—selecting those that mattered and choosing the passages that could be compressed and summarised and those that had to be given textually.

A serious illness, which disabled me for months in 1931, happily gave me the opportunity I had many times sought in vain to retire from the front line in politics. It is a mistake to imagine that when leading politicians say they have a hankering for a tranquil life, they are shamming modesty. The desire for periods of quiet and repose comes with increasing force with the advance of years. And although old habits and aptitudes of work and conflict cling to your arm every time you take up a pen to write the letter of final retirement, it only means that you feel, in withdrawing from the struggle for causes in which you believe, that you are a shirker and it is your duty to go on fighting to the end. There is perhaps another reason. Men who have contracted the habit of hard work dread a life of idleness whilst their physical reserves are unexhausted. Providence decided the issue for me when I became a serious casualty and was thus carried out of action for months. That was when I started preparing for my book. I then got so interested in the work as well as the subject that I went on, and here I have finished. Had anyone told me five years ago that I, who was accustomed to commit my thoughts to speech or action, should ever have written six volumes containing a million words on any subject, I should have derided such a possibility. And certainly had I been informed that the public would have steadily maintained its interest in the contents of these volumes, I should have been doubly surprised. As this book has an autobiographical aspect perhaps I may be forgiven for noting these intimate personal musings.

I take this opportunity of thanking the Press of all parties for the generosity of the treatment they have meted out to my efforts. Reviewers have on the whole been kind and considerate. I am profoundly grateful for their indulgence towards a novice. It has been my first experience of the attentions of this important and intimidating profession. They are no exception to any other



avocation in the fact that they can be divided into several classes. There are the conscientious and the skimmers—those who read what they review and those who review what they clearly have never read. There are the tolerant and the captious. There are a few—very few—who having formed preconceived opinions and repeatedly expressed them, only seek out passages that seem to confirm their established prejudices and ignore the rest. It is embarrassing for men who have for years expressed pontifical judgments on military, diplomatic or political questions, to find that there are unanswerable documents of whose existence they were not aware, and which prove that the conclusions they had come to and had always so dogmatically expressed were entirely inconsistent with the facts. There are few who have the courage or uprightness to admit that they were misinformed. They therefore take refuge in the somewhat cowardly expedient of ignoring the evidence thrust upon them and reiterating with acidulated emphasis the allegations they had made in total ignorance of the truth. Refutation does not reconcile them, it simply incenses and exasperates them to a more infuriated exercise of their sting.

In the main the latter type concentrate on two criticisms. The first is based on the allegation that the War Cabinet could have achieved an honourable peace in 1917. This allegation has been completely exposed by a wealth of documentary proof which shows that at no stage of the War before their defeat in the autumn of 1918 were the Germans prepared to concede terms which would not have actually rewarded them for plunging the world into this horrible war. Any fair-minded perusal of the documents—German as well as British—which I have published, would have induced a change of opinion on the part of honest critics. Herein I have been disappointed. Men whose political bias is entrenched in misconception only dig deeper when their parapets are demolished.

Then there is the type of critic who with cockatoo persistency and irrelevancy repeats the cry that I condemn every general, admiral and statesman who took any part in the War, and that I consider myself alone as being above criticism. Had they really read these volumes, they would undoubtedly find much censure of two or three generals and one or two statesmen, but praise lavished on many statesmen, generals and admirals, and especially unstinted admiration given to the millions of officers and men who fought and endured to the end on land and sea and in the air and whose valour and sacrifice won the War. I might enumerate some of the military and naval chiefs and a few of the politicians whom I have sought out for laudation. On the British side there are Kitchener, Plumer, Allenby, Maude, Jeadwine, Cowans, Lawrence, Monash and Currie; amongst the admirals, Henderson, Roger Keyes and Richmond. Amongst the French generals, I have expressed my

admiration of Foch, Castelnau, Mangin and Gallieni. From the Americans I have singled out General Bliss and Admiral Sims. That is not a mean array of high-class generals and admirals in any war. But I decline to join in the clangour of cymbals for the inefficient. As to statesmen, I have gladly recognised the service rendered by Bonar Law, Milner, Balfour, Smuts, Botha, Borden, Hughes, Geddes, Maclay, Arthur Henderson, Barnes, Clemenceau and many others. Without the help such men rendered victory would have been unattainable. The War was won by the incredible valour and endurance of the men who braved—actually and physically—death in every element for the honour of their native land. But they would not have been given a chance to win had it not been for the skill of men who worked behind and outside the region of horror where the soldier, the sailor (of all services) and the aviator discharged their perilous duties.

In living over once again year by year the four years of the World War I find a deepening and intensification of reflections produced in my mind by a daily contact with the happenings of war.

The first is my amazement that there should be millions of men who could go through such horrifying experiences without a complete shattering of nerves and brain. Multitudes of young men in many lands endured it for years and have survived without any obvious impairment of either. I constantly meet survivors of the War who for years endured the terrifying sensations of modern warfare, haunted day by day and night by night by the menace of death in its ghastliest and most agonising aspect. Psychologically and spiritually it must have had repercussions which are not easy to trace. But physiologically they seem to be as calm, as steady of nerve and as full of the joy of life as the men who never passed through those scorching fires. This courage possessed by so many ordinary men has always been to me incomprehensible. It is immeasurably great. In training, in discipline, in equipment and efficiency there were marked distinctions between one belligerent nation and another. There was no difference in the high courage of the common man whatever his country of origin. What makes war so terrifying is that it is waged by men. No human effort brings forth so clearly and impressively the strongest qualities of mankind as a whole. But war is a prodigal and stupid waste of these virile attributes. Evoked, stimulated and organised by and for some beneficent movement which is productive not of ruin and death but of something which gives life and gives it abundantly to the children of men, it would transfigure the world.

And that brings me to another impression engraven on my mind by the events of the War. As a tribunal for ascertaining the rights and the wrongs of a dispute, war is crude, uncertain and costly. It is true that the World War ended, as I still believe, in a victory for

Right. But it was won not on the merits of the case, but on a balance of resources and of blunders. The reserves of man-power, of material and of money at the command of the victorious Powers were overwhelmingly greater than those possessed by the vanquished. They were thus better able to maintain a prolonged struggle. Both sides blundered badly, but the mistakes committed by the Central Powers were more fatal, inasmuch as they did not possess the necessary resources to recover from the effects of their errors of judgment.

As I have pointed out in the text of this book, in 1915 the Allies committed the grave strategical error of concentrating their strength on a tremendous offensive against the German ramparts in France, and thus allowed the Central Powers with a few divisions to conquer the Balkans. But this mistake was more than counter-balanced by the incredible blunder committed by the German Staff in the spring and summer of 1916, when they hurled their best legions against Verdun in a vain effort to capture it. The Allied mistake prolonged the War. The German mistake lost them the War.

In the spring of 1916, if Falkenhayn, instead of wasting irrecoverable opportunity and time over Verdun, had taken Conrad's advice and attacked Italy and had adopted Hoffmann's proposal to finish off Russia, the issue of the War would have been different. Caporetto and Brest-Litovsk in 1916—instead of 1917 and 1918—when our army was not fully trained, with no America in the War and no starvation in Germany or Austria, would have forced the Western Powers to accept an unfavourable peace. The great offensive of March, 1918, came too late to save the Central Powers. By November, 1917, France and Britain were strong enough to rescue Italy from the consequences of her crushing defeat. And by the late spring of 1918 American reinforcements were pouring in to strengthen the Allied front just as the reserves of the Central Powers were exhausted. Judgment which is dependent on such contingencies is too precarious. Chance is the supreme judge in war and not Right. There are other judges on the bench but Chance presides.

If Germany had been led by Bismarck and Moltke instead of by von Bethmann-Hollweg and Falkenhayn, the event of the great struggle between a military autocracy and democracy would in all human probability have been different. The blunders of Germany saved us from the consequences of our own. But let all who trust justice to the arbitrament of war bear in mind that the issue may depend less on the righteousness of the cause than on the cunning and craft of the contestants. It is the teaching of history, and this war enforces the lesson. And the cost is prohibitive. It cripples all the litigants. The death of ten millions and the mutilation of another twenty millions amongst the best young men of a generation is a terrible bill of costs to pay in a suit for determining the



responsibility and penalty for the murder of two persons, however exalted their rank. When you add to that £50,000,000,000 expended in slaughter and devastation, the complete dislocation of the international trade of the world, unemployment on a scale unparalleled in history, the overthrow of free institutions over the greater part of Europe, and the exasperation and perpetuation of international feuds which threaten to plunge the world into an even greater catastrophe, one must come to the conclusion that war is much too costly and barbarous a method of settling quarrels amongst the nations of earth.

*Bron-y-de, Churt.*

D. LLOYD GEORGE.

*October, 1936.*

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
Preface to Volume Two . . . . .	v
<i>CHAPTER LVI</i>	
The Struggle with the Turk : Palestine and Mesopotamia . . . . .	1069
<i>CHAPTER LVII</i>	
Creating the Air Ministry . . . . .	1095
<i>CHAPTER LVIII</i>	
Stockholm and Mr. Arthur Henderson . . . . .	1116
<i>CHAPTER LIX</i>	
Problems of Labour Unrest . . . . .	1141
<i>CHAPTER LX</i>	
Electoral Reform . . . . .	1164
<i>CHAPTER LXI</i>	
The Austrian Peace Move . . . . .	1175
<i>CHAPTER LXII</i>	
Vatican and Kuhlmann Peace Moves . . . . .	1205
<i>CHAPTER LXIII</i>	
THE CAMPAIGN OF THE MUD : PASSCHENDAELE	
1, How the Plans Were Laid; 2, The Condition of the French Army and Consequent Change in French Strategy; 3, Discussions with the Government on the Policy of the Flanders Offensive; 4, Continuation of Deliberations : Misrepresentations to the Government; 5, The Four Months' Battle for a Fraction of the Objective; 6, The Tactics of Deception; 7, Consequences of Passchendaele . . . . .	1247
<i>CHAPTER LXIV</i>	
The Battle of Cambrai . . . . .	1334
<i>APPENDIX</i>	
1342	
<i>CHAPTER LXV</i>	
The Cabinet's Dilemma . . . . .	1365
<i>CHAPTER LXVI</i>	
The Caporetto Disaster . . . . .	1372

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER LXVII

	PAGE
The United Front : The Inter-Allied Council . . . . .	1405

## CHAPTER LXVIII

Summary and Results of 1917 Campaign . . . . .	1450
--	------

## APPENDICES TO CHAPTER LXIII

### APPENDIX I

Memorandum by Sir William Robertson . . . . .	1461
---	------

### APPENDIX II

Memorandum by Sir Douglas Haig . . . . .	1464
--	------

## CHAPTER LXIX

Outlook for 1918 . . . . .	1467
----------------------------	------

## CHAPTER LXX

The Belligerents State Their Peace Terms . . . . .	1477
--	------

### APPENDIX I

Report of Mr. Philip Kerr's Interview with Dr. Parodi, Head of the Mission Solaire Egyptienne, on December 18th, 1917. (a) Prefatory Note by General Smuts ; (b) Mr. Philip Kerr's Report . . . . .	1504
---	------

### APPENDIX II

The Peace Declaration : Mr. Lloyd George's Speech to the Trade Unions, 5th January, 1918 . . . . .	1510
--	------

## CHAPTER LXXI

Bolshevism Conquers Russia . . . . .	1518
--------------------------------------	------

### APPENDIX

Trotsky's Statement of Bolshevik Policy . . . . .	1559
---	------

## CHAPTER LXXII

### THE PROBLEM OF MAN-POWER

1, The Outlook for 1918; 2, Negotiations with Labour and Ireland	1561
--	------

## CHAPTER LXXIII

Clemenceau . . . . .	1602
----------------------	------

## CHAPTER LXXIV

### THE MILITARY POSITION

1, Sir Douglas Haig's Views; 2, Planning the 1918 Campaign; 3, The Allied Strategy for 1918; 4, The Meeting of the Allied Supreme Council	1610
---	------



# CONTENTS

## APPENDIX I

Note 12 . . . . .	PAGE 1643
-------------------	--------------

## APPENDIX II

Clemenceau's First Address to the Supreme Allied Council . .	1650
--	------

## CHAPTER LXXV

Extension of the British Front . . . . .	1653
--	------

## CHAPTER LXXVI

The Fall of Robertson . . . . .	1668
---------------------------------	------

## CHAPTER LXXVII

Before the Offensive . . . . .	1697
--------------------------------	------

## CHAPTER LXXVIII

The March Retreat . . . . .	1722
-----------------------------	------

## CHAPTER LXXIX

### BEAUVAIS AND THE CAMPAIGN OF THE NORTH

1, The Beauvais Conference; 2, The Battle of the Lys; 3, How the British Public Faced Defeat . . . . .	1743
--	------

## APPENDIX

Extract from a Report of the Second Meeting of the Fifth Session of the Supreme War Council . . . . .	1775
---	------

## CHAPTER LXXX

The Maurice Debate . . . . .	1778
------------------------------	------

## CHAPTER LXXXI

The American Armies in France . . . . .	1792
---	------

## CHAPTER LXXXII

### STROKE AND COUNTER-STROKE

1, The German Summer Offensive; 2, The Wilson Memorandum; 3, The German Retreat . . . . .	1834
---	------

## CHAPTER LXXXIII

### AFTERMATH IN RUSSIA

1. General; 2, Murmansk and Archangel; 3, Siberia; 4. The Caspian .	1885
---	------

## CHAPTER LXXXIV

### DAWN BREAKS IN THE EAST

1, Salonika; 2, The Turkish Collapse; 3, Italy . . . . .	1910
--	------

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>CHAPTER LXXXV</i>	
HOW PEACE CAME	
1, Germany Asks for Terms; 2, The Terms of the Armistice . . . . .	1930
<i>CHAPTER LXXXVI</i>	
A Great Educational Reform . . . . .	1988
<i>CHAPTER LXXXVII</i>	
Some Reflections on the War . . . . .	1995
<i>CHAPTER LXXXVIII</i>	
An Imperial War . . . . .	2004
<i>CHAPTER LXXXIX</i>	
Lord Haig's Diaries and After . . . . .	2011
<i>CHAPTER XC</i>	
Some Reflections on the Functions of Governments and Soldiers respectively in a War . . . . .	2032
<i>APPENDIX</i>	
Terms of Armistice with Germany . . . . .	2044
List of Maps, Documents, etc. . . . .	2054
Index . . . . .	2055

## LIST OF PLATES

	PAGE
Troops moving over Passchendaele Battlefields by means of duckboards; The Battlefield of Passchendaele . . . . .	xvii
M. Clemenceau and Mr. Lloyd George . . . . .	xviii
Marshal Foch . . . . .	xix
Barbed Wire Guarding the Hindenburg Line . . . . .	xx
The Crowd on Armistice Day . . . . .	xxi
(1) Field-Marshal Viscount Allenby, (2) General John J. Pershing, Commander-in-Chief American Expeditionary Forces; (3) General Luigi Cadorna, Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Army, 1917; (4) General Monash . . . . .	xxii
(1) Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson; (2) General Ludendorff; (3) The Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson; (4) The Rt. Hon. H. A. L. Fisher . . . . .	xxiii
(1) Baron von Kuhlmann; (2) Prince Max of Baden; (3) Lenin; (4) Kerensky . . . . .	xxiv







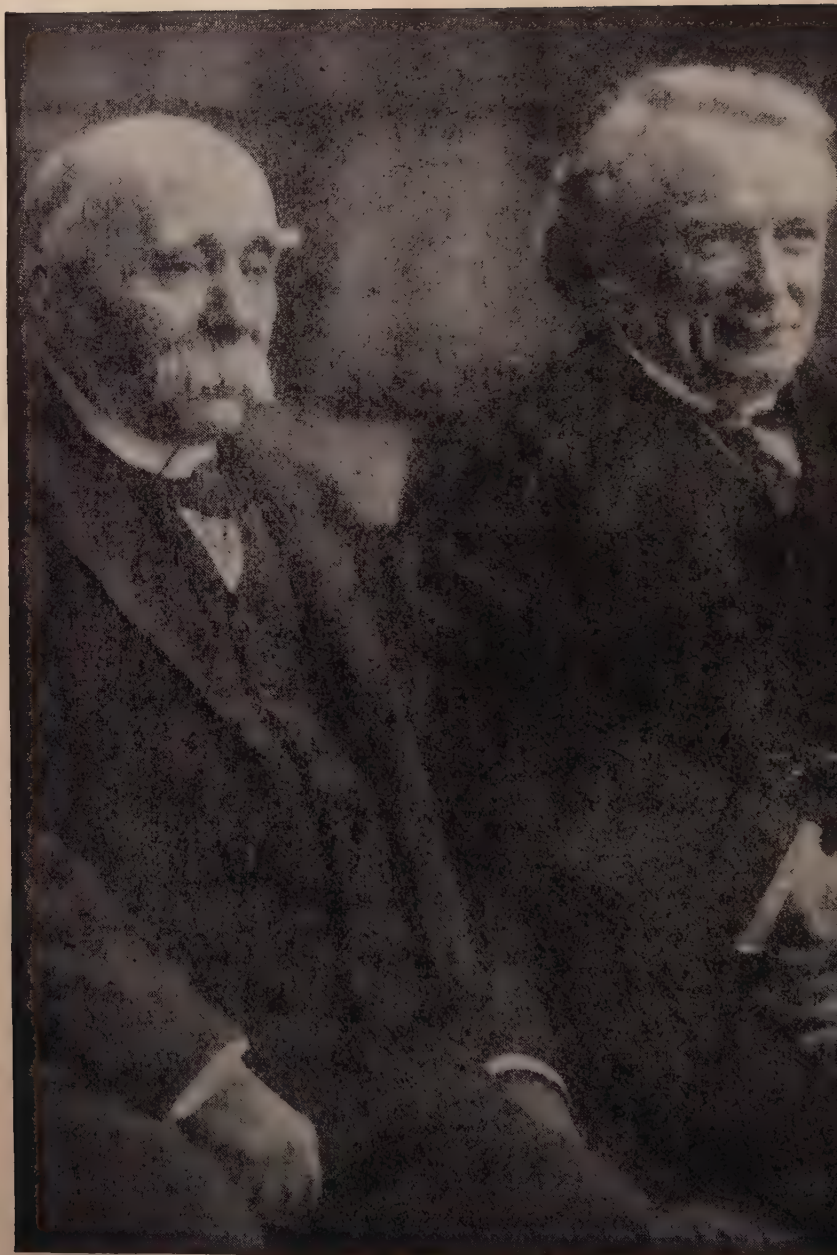
*Imperial War Museum.*

Troops moving over Passchendaele Battlefield by means of duckboards, 1917.



*Imperial War Museum.*

The Battlefield of Passchendaele, 1917.



M. Clemenceau and Mr. Lloyd George.



*À M. Lloyd George, au Premier Ministre  
qui chassa les nuages d'un ciel fortorageux,  
Cordialement,*

*F. Foch*  
11.10.18.

Marshal Foch.





*Imperial War Museum.*

Barbed wire guarding the Hindenburg Line.



*Imperial War Museum.*

The crowd on Armistice Day.



*Ludley Glanfield.*

Field-Marshal Viscount Allenby.



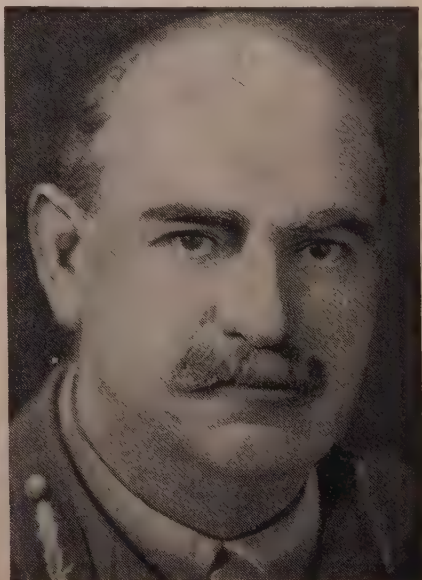
*E.N.A.*

General John J. Pershing, Commander-in-Chief American Expeditionary Forces.



*E.N.A.*

General Luigi Cadorna, Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Army, 1917.



*Elliott & Fry.*

General Monash.





*M. G. C. Beresford.*

Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson.



*E. N. A.*

General Ludendorff.

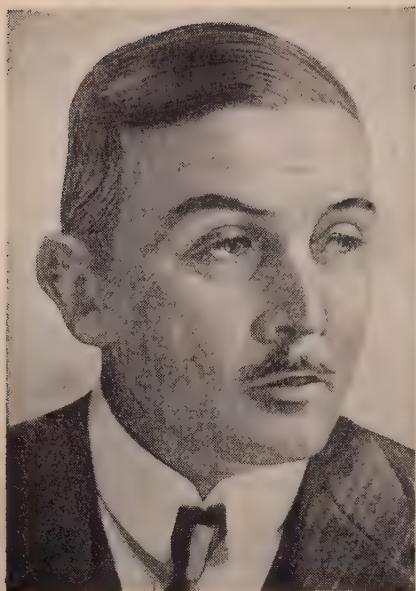


The Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson.



The Rt. Hon. H. A. L. Fisher.





E.N.A.

Baron von Kuhlmann.



E.N.A.

Prince Max of Baden.



E.N.A.

Lenin.



E.N.A.

Kerensky.

# WAR MEMOIRS

## CHAPTER LVI

### THE STRUGGLE WITH THE TURK

#### PALESTINE AND MESOPOTAMIA

IF the year 1917 was one of difficulty and disaster for the Allies on the battlefields of Europe, it witnessed some striking and heartening successes for our cause in the Near East. Here was the one bright spot in our land operations. And we needed the encouragement; for nearer home we had the failure of the Nivelle offensive, the mutiny of the French troops, the breakdown of Russia, the massacres of Passchendaele, and the Italian collapse of Caporetto. The "Western Front" strategy had once more turned out to be a bloody repulse, bloodier than ever. That failure had reacted on the position in the Near East, for before the close of the year it had rendered inevitable the conclusion of armistices with the Central Powers by both Russia and Roumania, and their exit from any further military service on the Allied side.

There was no period in the War when the overthrow of the Turkish Empire could not have been accomplished by the joint action of the British and Russian Governments, with an effort well within the compass of their resources. There was no period, certainly during the first three years, when that overthrow would not have produced a decisive effect on the fortunes of the War.

As a feature of the general strategy of the War, the elimination of Turkey from the ranks of our enemies would have given us that access to Russia and Roumania which was so disastrously lacking, and without which they were driven out of the War. It would, in 1915, have given us the control of the Balkans. Afterwards it would have enabled us to recover the control we lost in September, 1915, and thus have put us in a position to join forces with the Roumanians and the Russians. The Allied spear could have been thrust under the fifth rib of Austria, the Danubian flank which was her weakest side geographically and ethnographically. It would have saved Britain over 250,000 troops from Egypt and Mesopotamia and Russia, 150,000 men from the Caucasus. The course of the War would have been altered and shortened. Further, for the British Empire the fight with Turkey had a special importance of its own. The Ottoman Khalif was the religious head of the Moslem world, and there were more Moslems in the British Empire than under any other

ruler, which made our conflict with Turkey a very delicate problem. The Turkish Empire lay right across the track by land or water to our great possessions in the East—India, Burma, Malaya, Borneo, Hong Kong, and the Dominions of Australia and New Zealand. Egypt, through which the Suez Canal—the “jugular vein” of the Empire—ran, was under Turkish suzerainty. It was thus vital for our communications, as it was essential for our prestige in the East, that once the Turks declared war against us, we should defeat and discredit them without loss of time. A final defeat of the Turkish armies, by overwhelming numbers after they had on equal terms beaten us in battle after battle for three campaigns, left a bad impression on the Oriental mind. The importance of a speedy victory over the Turks for the security of the British Empire was undeniable.

Could such a defeat have been inflicted on the Turk in 1915 or 1916 as would have forced him to make peace with the Allies? No one who takes the trouble to master the elementary facts can for a moment doubt the feasibility of achieving such a result early in the War. The Turkish Army was in such a bad state in 1912 that it was easily defeated by the Balkan States. Most of its useful guns had been either captured or destroyed in that conflict. The Arab population, which constituted 20 per cent. of the population of the Turkish Empire, was disaffected. The Anatolian peasant, who had always proved himself to be a good fighter when well led, was war-weary. His unbroken defeats during the Balkan War had for the time being taken the spirit out of him. Nearly half of this ill-equipped and dispirited army was sent to face the Russians in Armenia.

As regards the general disposition of the Turkish military forces in 1915-16, it must be borne in mind that the real political aims of Turkey at this time were Pan-Turanian. They particularly wished to expand in Trans-Caucasia and Cis-Caucasia, regions inhabited by kindred tribes; and to assert and maintain hegemony over Persia. Pan-Turanianism having replaced the Pan-Islamism of Abdul Hamid, the Turks were comparatively little interested in the alien Arabs, and throughout the War they tended to direct their major efforts towards the Caucasus.

The fight against Great Britain made no appeal to the Turk. There was nothing in it to rouse him from his despondency and disillusionment. At the end of the War, in October, 1918, it was found that there were just as many deserters as there were men in the field. The total ration strength of the Turkish Army at that date was 250,000. The number of deserters had then reached the figure of 225,000. Wounded soldiers when they were discharged from the hospital mostly walked home and never returned to the colours. Except at the Dardanelles, the Turkish Army was a lame bluff. Even at Gallipoli it could easily have been overcome, had the attack been properly organised and directed and made in good time. In



Palestine and Mesopotamia nothing and nobody could have saved the Turk from complete collapse in 1915 and 1916 except our General Staff. The real citadel of the Ottoman Empire was neither at Achi Baba, Baghdad nor Jerusalem—but in Whitehall. For three years this redoubtable garrison of the effete beat off every attack made on the attenuated armies of the Turk. The War Office saved Gallipoli from falling; for two years it protected the feeble garrison of Palestine from meeting its doom. It did what it could to avert the capture of Baghdad.

As early as the winter of 1914-15, Enver Pasha collected an army of 150,000 men to attack the Russians in the Caucasus. But they attempted an impossible movement through the snows of the high mountain passes, and were defeated with heavy losses by Yudenitch's Russian Army, which numbered 100,000 at that time. Nearly a third of the Turks must have perished in the snow, and one of the four Corps employed was enveloped and destroyed by the Russians. The rest of the Turkish Army was scattered around and about Mesopotamia, Palestine, Syria, the Hejaz, and the Marmora. Asia Minor and Palestine had a long coast-line which laid them open to attack at many vulnerable points from the sea. This menace alone would have absorbed many of the Turkish troops. The Turkish Empire was therefore specially vulnerable to attacks from a power that had a complete command of the sea. In the early stages of the War the Turks had no through rail communicating with their territories beyond the Taurus mountains. Had there been during the first three campaigns a resolute and well-directed attack either on Alexandretta, Palestine or Mesopotamia, the wretched force on the eastern side of the Taurus could have been swept up with the greatest ease.

A considerable force was kept at Alexandretta to prevent the possibility of a landing. Smyrna for the same reason absorbed a certain number of troops. The Russian Navy had complete command of the Black Sea. The Russians claim that up to the end of February, 1916, they had sunk about 4,000 Turkish schooners and feluccas. The sea communication via the Black Sea to victual, munition and reinforce the Turkish Army in the Caucasus was cut off by the Russian Navy. The land route from the Bosphorus took about 30 days. On the other hand, on the Russian side the railway came down through the Caucasus and the railhead was only 80 miles from the great Turkish fortress of Erzerum. In addition to this handicap, the fact that the command of the Black Sea was in the hands of the Russians exposed the whole of that coast to the danger of a sudden attack at many points. The roads to Syria and Mesopotamia were bad, and the railway would not enable the Turks to send the necessary supplies to any point east of the Taurus mountains, had there been a serious attack. The lack of communications would have been



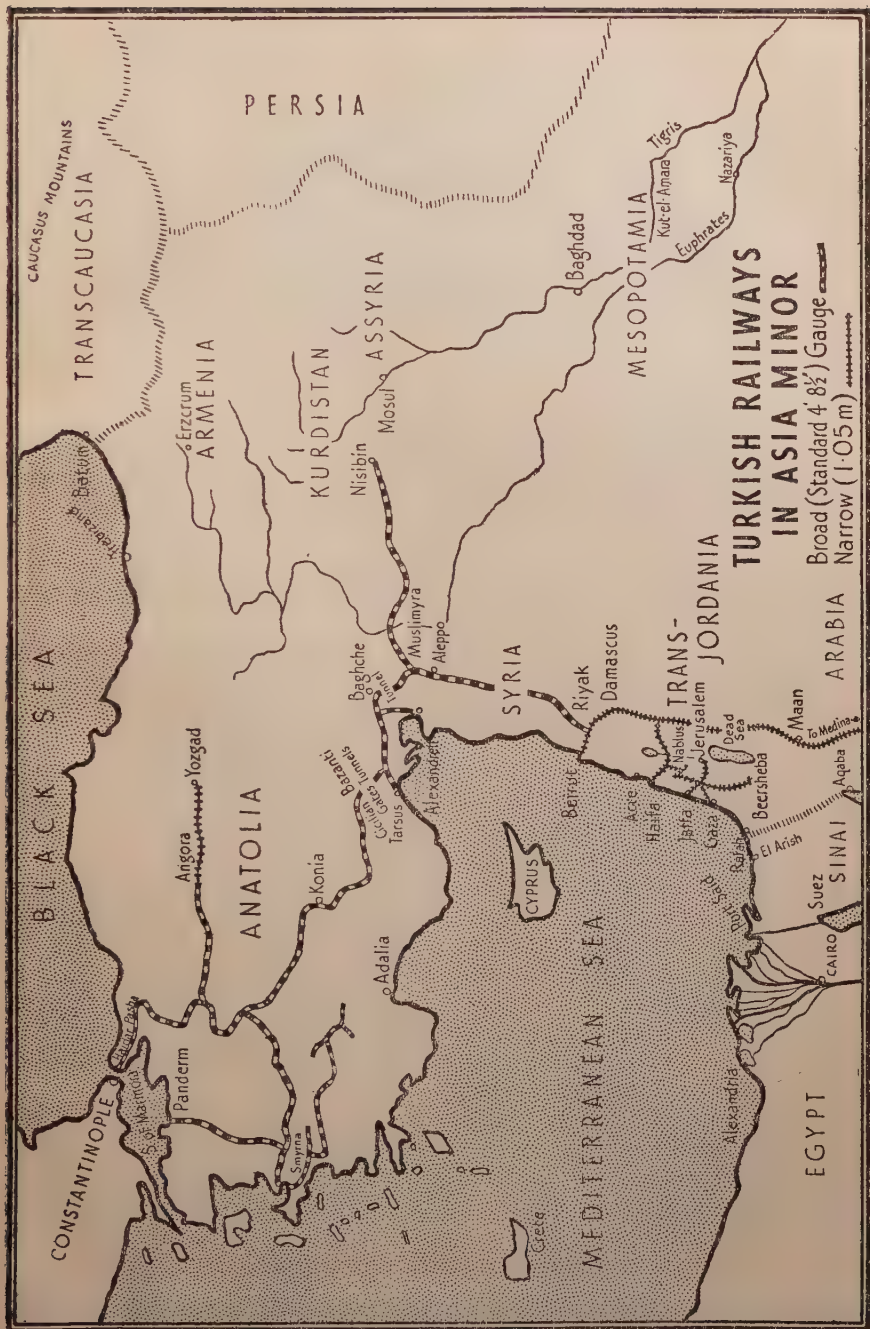
fatal to the Turkish defence, had there been a concerted attack pressed with determination, by the Russians from the Caucasus and by the British from Egypt or Alexandretta and Mesopotamia. The Turkish Armies could have been crumpled up in a single campaign. Even if the supplies and reinforcements had been available in the Constantinople area, they could not have been transported to that distance in time to avoid disaster.

The map shows the Turkish rail equipment in Asia Minor during the War. The line from Haidar Pasha Station at Scutari to Riyak, 25 miles from Damascus, was a single-track standard gauge branch of the Anatolian-Baghdad Railway. But it had two serious gaps—one in the Taurus mountains, 20 miles long, and the other in the Amanus mountains five miles long. In these gaps there were 20 tunnels waiting to be completed. The Amanus gap (at Baghche) was covered early in 1917, and a light line run through the Taurus tunnels at the same time; but the standard gauge line was not carried through till almost the end of the War. The first through train from Haidar Pasha to Riyak did not run till September, 1918. Up to Muslimie, north of Aleppo, this line also had to carry the traffic for the Turkish forces in Mesopotamia. The rolling stock was also deficient.

Troops and supplies for Palestine and the Hejaz had to be detrained at Bozanti, and were moved down by road to Tarsus, whence they were railed to Alexandretta. From there they went by road again to Aleppo to rejoin the railway. All supplies had to rely on mule, camel and motor for these two considerable treks—and the routes had to carry the Mesopotamian as well as the Palestinian and Arabian supplies.

From Riyak, north of Damascus, the further railway connection was by a light, 1.05 metre-gauge line, which ran down to Medina in the Hejaz, with a branch running to Haifa. From this branch an arm ran down through the plain of Sharon, and connected with the Jerusalem-Jaffa light railway—a French line with a different gauge (1 metre). These light systems were prevented by the British Navy from getting any coal, and of course it was practically impossible to send them any across the Taurus. So during most of the War they had to rely on wood fuel. This muddled, gapped, and at its best, single line system was obviously unsuited for the movement, provisioning and munitioning of any large forces.

The war against the Turks was carried on by the Russians across the Caucasus, and by the British at Gallipoli, in Mesopotamia and across the Suez Canal. This is hardly the place to recount in detail the course of the campaigns against Turkey. In previous chapters I have made some reference to the Gallipoli muddle and sketched the gruesome story of the first advance in Mesopotamia. In Egypt we had proclaimed a British Protectorate as soon as war with Turkey



broke out, deposed the pro-Turkish Khedive and appointed his pro-British uncle as Sultan, and made Egypt an important military base. During the first two years of the War we stood on the defensive behind the Suez Canal against small and ill-equipped Turkish forces. They bluffed us by feeble assaults, which they had no means of pushing further. It took us 21 months to muster sufficient courage to attack a much inferior army and drive them some way back into the peninsula of Sinai. When I became Premier at the end of 1916, we were still maintaining a defensive attitude on all the Turkish Fronts, although we had overwhelming forces at our disposal in these areas.

In a telegram to the C.I.G.S. on 13th December, 1916, General Murray said:—

“Enemy can now bring 25,000 against me: in a month’s time 40,000: if he abandons Hejaz, another 12,000. Any further additions must come from Europe, Mesopotamia or Caucasus.”

The Turkish forces were seriously ill-nourished, for there was not enough corn in Canaan to feed them, and their transport mules were half-starved.

A considerable proportion of their troops were drawn from the Arab population, which was against Turkish rule. This disaffection culminated in a serious revolt in the Hejaz in the summer of 1916.

The “Official History” also notes that the Historical Section of the Turkish General Staff gives the strength of the Turkish forces which took part in the first Battle of Gaza, on the 27th March, 1917, including one regiment of the 53rd Division which advanced from the north to intervene in the battle, as 16,000 rifles.\*

Reinforcements were hurried down after that battle, and at the time of the second Battle of Gaza, Turkish sources state that the ration strength of their force was 48,845: including 18,185 rifles, 86 machine-guns, 101 guns: but only 68 guns were in action at Gaza II and only 12 of these were above field-gun calibre. On these figures, the “Official History” notes that “the rifle strength is so small in comparison with the ration strength that the latter probably applies to all troops in Southern Syria.”†

The volume of Military Statistics gives the total strength of the British Expeditionary Forces in Egypt and Palestine on 1st February, 1917, as over 158,000, including 7,500 Indians. Upwards of 50 per cent. of the total were infantry. Not all of these, of course, were up on the Palestine Front; at the second Battle of Gaza, three British infantry divisions and two mounted divisions were in action.

\* “Official History of the War” (Military Operations, Egypt and Palestine), Vol. I, p. 280.

† *ibid.*, p. 379.



General Maude, in charge of our Mesopotamian forces, had been told by the C.I.G.S. at the end of September, 1916, that he must expect no further reinforcements, and must confine himself to defending the oilfields and pipe-lines of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, and holding the Basrah Vilayet. At the end of October, on the intercession of General Monro, the new Commander-in-Chief of India, Sir William Robertson relented to the extent of giving Maude permission to maintain an aggressive front, and exert local forward pressure against the Turks, but only within the four corners of the general instructions for a defensive policy by which he had been limited. In Egypt, Sir Archibald Murray had similarly been instructed to pursue a mainly defensive policy. He was a General well adapted to the faithful conduct of a timorous policy. Such a message from the War Office read by him on the balcony of his hotel at Cairo would be as welcome as a cool breeze in the sultry desert air. It was suggested that his best line for defence of the Suez Canal would be at El Arish, on the eastern side of the Sinai Peninsula, which meant advancing over his front some distance. He asked for a further division to give him an adequate force for this operation, but when it was not forthcoming, he agreed to attempt the advance with the forces at his disposal.

One other factor—a vitally important one—in our conflict with Turkey must be mentioned. As I have already pointed out, the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula were no lovers of the Turks, and were much more inclined to friendship with the British. When hostilities opened between Turkey and the Allies, and the Ottoman Khalif proclaimed a Holy War against us, the rulers of the Arabs refused to accept and publish his proclamation, and on the contrary, watched for an opportunity to throw off the Turkish yoke. Our agents among them, who included men long skilled in the arts of oriental diplomacy, encouraged this attitude, and promised them arms and ammunition. The issue was precipitated by the Turks, who got wind of the Arab disaffection, and decided to suppress it by the traditional Turkish method of massacre and brutality. Their policy succeeded further north, in Syria, for the time. But in Arabia the Sherif of Mecca, who ruled the Hejaz—the part of Arabia containing the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina—and was of the Quraish, or tribe of the Prophet, decided to strike first, before the Turkish reinforcements coming to the Arabian garrisons could arrive. He revolted against the Turks in June, 1916. One of his sons, the Emir Feisal, attacked Medina, the terminus of the Hejaz railway, while another, Ali, broke the line further north, and Sherif Hussein himself overwhelmed the Turkish garrison of Mecca.

We promptly sent to their aid rifles, ammunition and stores, which were landed at the port of Rabegh in the Hejaz, half-way up the Red Sea. We also sent two mountain batteries, manned by Egyptian



gunners. Throughout the autumn of 1916, when the situation in the Hejaz was reported to be very uncertain, and a danger existed that the Turks might advance on Rabegh, *en route* for Mecca, and capture the stores there and cut the connection between the Sherif and ourselves, there was frequent debate in the War Committee whether a strong detachment of British forces should not be landed at Rabegh, to fortify that port and hold it secure against the feared Turkish advance.

Thus we had to take action in regard to three different campaigns against the Turks; the British expedition in Mesopotamia; the Suez Canal Front; and the Arab revolt. I was anxious myself to see real pressure being exerted against the Turk. But the War Office was strongly opposed to increasing our commitments on any of these fronts. In the circumstances, it was fortunate for us that our long connection with India and Egypt had resulted in the possession by us of many capable officers experienced in the kind of desert warfare which these campaigns afforded, who knew how to get the maximum effect with comparatively small forces; and that we could command agents with a close knowledge of oriental people and their ways.

Of all issues, the most immediately urgent appeared to be that of ensuring the safety of our Arab allies in the Hejaz.

In January, 1917, we sent a small military Mission to assist Lieut.-Colonel Wilson, our representative with the Sherif. One of the men included in this Mission was a young archæologist, Captain T. E. Lawrence, who had prior to this been doing intelligence work for us in Cairo. Lawrence actually arrived, ahead of the Mission, in December. He had made a preliminary visit in October, when his report, after a meeting with Feisal, had considerable influence on our subsequent action. He is one of the few romantic figures of this mechanical war. On land, most of the romance of such a war is in the dauntless movements of masses marching through Hades. Two or three hypnotic personalities alone appeared. Lawrence of Arabia was one of them. In the Hejaz he got on amazingly well with the Arabs, whose confidence he was able to win in the fullest measure, and he became an adviser and military leader among them in a series of intrepid adventures which harassed and embarrassed the unorganised, ill-equipped Turk. Without any military training, like Clive, he developed a remarkable military flair. Largely owing to his inspiration, a mobile force of irregular cavalry was raised amongst the Arabs who had rebelled against Turkish rule. Although the force raised was a small one, compared with the enormous numbers of men engaged on both sides on the Palestine Fronts, it is difficult to overestimate the value of the service they rendered in the attack upon the Turkish positions. The Arab horsemen belonged to the same race and were men of the same type and training as the great cavalry which swept the remnants of Roman civilisation from the

whole of North Africa, conquered Spain, crossed the Pyrenees and challenged Christendom on the plains of Western Europe. Their numbers were not great: the swarms of dashing riders who successfully fought the Crusaders in Syria and Palestine can no longer be levied in these depopulated lands. But their daring was as great as that of their forefathers, and their mobility as baffling to their foes. Under Lawrence's guidance, the Arabs made a flank move up the Red Sea, whence they operated against the line to Medina. They made many breaks in this line, but they did not cut it. They also captured Wejh on the Red Sea, some way north of that town—this last with the aid of the British Red Sea patrol. The Turkish forces in Medina, far from being able to advance on Rabegh and Mecca, were thenceforward in a state of siege. A guerrilla warfare was waged on their communications, and early in July the Arabs defeated the Turkish forces in a desert battle near Ma'an, and captured Aqaba, which latter port was to serve them for their base throughout their successful campaign in 1918. The capture of this valuable maritime place removed all danger to the British communications in the Sinai Peninsula, and enabled the Arabs to threaten the flank of the Turkish forces which were opposing ours. The result was that there were more Turks occupied in guarding the long line of the Hejaz railway, and the territory south of it than were opposing the British in Palestine.\* These masterly tactics demonstrated the real use which could be made of the mobility of mounted troops in this way. Up to the present, the sole use for which cavalry had been designated was to charge barbed entrenchments, whilst Lawrence's strategy showed that if the fine cavalry divisions which were wasted in Flanders had been put to proper use, they could have achieved the overthrow of the Turk without diminishing by a single unit forces which were essential for siege operations on the Western Front. In Palestine they would have been in the right place: in Flanders they were in the way.

While the desert tribes were thus being helped to revolt against the Turk, we were pursuing our own campaigns against the enemy. In Mesopotamia, General Maude had been given permission to exert such pressure as he safely could with the forces at his disposal. He knew that these forces were more than sufficient to sweep away the remnant of Turkish resistance, and that there was no justification for the palpitations that seized the General Staff whenever a fez appeared anywhere along the parapet. He realised that the new Government at home viewed an active policy with favour. This stimulated and encouraged his efforts. By the end of January, he had cleared the right bank of the Tigris, driven the strong Turkish forces out of Kut with heavy loss, and sent them and their reinforcements flying helter-skelter back towards Baghdad. He followed them up, inflicting

\* See Liddell Hart: "Lawrence of Arabia."

further losses on them, and by the end of February, 1917, he had put about three-quarters of their force out of action, taking 4,500 prisoners. The remnants had retreated in disorder on Baghdad, flinging guns and howitzers into the Tigris as they fled.

General Maude was anxious to follow up this success, and confident of his ability to do so. On 24th February, 1917, he cabled the C.I.G.S. asking for permission. His previous instructions, in September, 1916, had told him that no advance on Baghdad was to be contemplated, and he now asked:—

“In view of the change brought about in the situation by recent successes on Tigris Front, I shall be glad to learn whether His Majesty’s Government in any way desire to modify their instructions. . . . Until I get your reply I do not propose to delay, but intend to follow up retreating enemy closely, being careful however, to do nothing which will prevent me from *adjourning* my position readily according to your further orders. Enemy has suffered very severely during past 2½ months and his losses have been out of all proportion to his strength. Also we have captured over 4,500 prisoners besides guns and machine-guns, rifles, ammunition and material. This series of reverses would have completely broken troops possessed of less fighting qualities than Turks. Opportunity would, therefore, seem favourable for further advance if this accords with policy of His Majesty’s Government. Scope of such advance would depend on information received as to further enemy reinforcements being diverted in this direction. Owing, however, to heavy losses already incurred by Turkish forces as above, these, unless considerably more than we anticipate at present, have now lost much of their value.”

I was very anxious that Maude should now press on and capture Baghdad. Sir William Robertson viewed that proposal with instinctive disfavour, and raised various objections to it in the War Cabinet. There was the difficulty of maintaining the force. Baghdad was a difficult place to hold. There was the shipping shortage to consider, and the possibility of Turkish reinforcements. But on the admission of the General Staff as to the relative strength of the opposing forces on the spot I felt there was no risk with such a competent leader as General Maude, and the War Office could not ignore the fact that it would be a very valuable success, wiping out the shame of our defeat at Kut a year before, and encouraging both our own people and our friends in the East. Nor could they ignore the further fact that General Maude was confident of his ability to achieve this success, and was pressing on a defeated enemy with troops flushed with victory, whom he had led with consummate ability. The C.I.G.S. admitted that Maude could probably raid Baghdad successfully, though he



might not be able to hold it permanently until reinforcements reached him. He agreed with our decision that Maude might be told to establish British influence in the Baghdad Vilayet, and that subject to the security of his force he might exploit his success in this sense as fully as possible. The instructions sent to Maude were therefore liberally drafted, and the daily reports coming from him of more successes and prisoners captured made it impossible for the War Office to veto his victorious march on Baghdad. On 11th March, the British forces captured Baghdad, a stroke which at once rehabilitated our prestige in the East, and cheered our people at home—much in need just then of some bright news—while it was disheartening for the enemy, and cast the first shadows upon the Berlin-to-Baghdad ambitions of Germany.

A proclamation, prepared by the War Cabinet, was issued by General Maude to the people of Baghdad, announcing the liberation of the Mesopotamian Arabs from Turkish misrule, and summoning them to co-operate in the development of a sound civil administration. The language of the proclamation was guarded, as while we had no desire to annex Mesopotamia, we could not yet be sure what its ultimate form of Government would be. For the time being, Maude was advised to retain the existing governmental machinery, substituting Arab for Turkish personnel and spirit.

Thereafter, Maude proceeded to extend control over the whole Vilayet, and clear it of enemy troops. We had hoped to join forces, north of Baghdad, with the Russian Army of the Caucasus, and press forward jointly against the Turks. But as a result of the Russian Revolution, the Caucasus Army began to suffer the same demoralisation as overtook the Russian forces on other fronts. A year earlier the junction could have been effected and the Turkish Armies finally overthrown. On 2nd April, our Mesopotamian force made contact with the Russian Army, but it was too late then, for the Russians fell back before the end of the month, and in spite of our offer to provision them, they abandoned the struggle by degrees and withdrew from the ground they had won. The Turks were thus left free to send more forces against us, both in Mesopotamia and in Palestine.

Fortunately, General Maude's force was both well equipped and well led. There was no repetition, now that it was in charge of the home Government, of the neglect and cheese-paring which the Indian Government had practised so disastrously on the first Mesopotamian expedition. The Turks were determined to recover their lost position, and General von Falkenhayn was sent by Germany to assume charge of their operations. He made his headquarters at Aleppo, and reports reached us that considerable Turkish reinforcements were being mustered by him, supported by German troops, for an advance against us. But his railway communications were



unequal to an effective effort and our advance on the Palestine Front forced him to weaken his concentration. General Maude carried out a series of brilliant operations by which he defeated every Turkish force within his reach, and so broke their morale that they deserted freely, and would not stay within striking distance of our army.

On 18th November, 1917, General Maude died at Baghdad, stricken down by cholera. It was a great blow, for he was a most able General, sure-footed as well as dashing in his conduct of operations. His campaign up the Tigris had been a series of masterpieces of efficient strategy. After the capture of Baghdad he had established the British position there very firmly, and consolidated our authority throughout the area. Announcing his death to the House of Commons, on 19th November, I said of him: —

“Sir Stanley Maude, after a very distinguished career in subordinate positions in the early part of the War, assumed supreme command in Mesopotamia at a time when our arms were still under the stigma of the failure at Kut, and of the break-down of our transport organisation. By his power of organisation, his indefatigable energy, and his personal influence he not only overcame all the difficulties which had hitherto paralysed our efforts, but raised to the highest pitch the fighting spirit and enthusiasm of his men. He then led his armies to a series of victories which thwarted the enemy's ambition and safeguarded our position in the East, and in the fighting which led up to the capture of Baghdad, and secured the town after it had fallen into our hands, Sir Stanley Maude displayed qualities of resource, decision and enterprise which marked him out as a great leader of men and as a commander of the first rank. Now, in the hour of his triumph, he has been stricken down by a fell disease, and the country mourns the loss of one of its most valued sons.”

General Maude is one of the established military reputations of the War. His fame is rooted firmly in achievement of a high order.

Of all the points at which the Turkish power could be assailed, the most vital for us was the Egyptian Front. We had been in practical, if not theoretical charge of the administration of Egypt since the suppression of Arabi Pasha's revolt in 1881. And the Suez Canal was the gateway of the East. So our campaign across the Canal in the direction of Palestine was a highly important offensive-defensive so far as the interests of the British Empire were concerned. Since the abandonment of the Gallipoli adventure, it was the front on which we stood the best chance of striking a serious blow at Turkish power and compelling it to sue for peace.

Since it was my constant wish to strike the enemy as far as possible where he was weakest, and where the British military experience in

open warfare could secure its fullest utility, I was anxious as soon as the Balkan gate was slammed in our face, that we should exploit as fully as possible the opportunities which a campaign in Palestine could offer. But that view was not shared by our military advisers. Sir William Robertson records his view in his book "Soldiers and Statesmen" that the Egyptian campaign was useful so long as it went no further than the defence of the Suez Canal, but that these operations later "became objectionable, for they absorbed troops which should have been sent to the Western Front, where every available man was needed to assist in the great struggle then approaching its decisive phase."

"Decisive phase" is hardly an accurate description of the mud-crawling strategy of the Flanders campaign. If one-fifth of the men sacrificed in a venture which every General in the British Army (except Haig) condemned had been sent to Allenby, the Turk would have been so completely crushed that he would gladly have accepted peace terms.

But Sir William Robertson's resistance delayed and hampered the campaign which gave us the capture of Jerusalem, the triumphal advance to Damascus, and ultimately the overthrow of Turkey and her withdrawal from the War. This would have ensured the collapse of the Central Powers on the Balkan Front. And that would have accelerated the end. The Palestine campaign, like that in Mesopotamia, was one essentially suited to the special abilities and experience of British generals. It was the kind of warfare in which our army excelled, and in which we could reasonably hope to deal smashing blows on our enemies and to knock away the props by which the German power was sustained.

When I formed my Government, the instructions under which Sir Archibald Murray was operating charged him to confine himself to the defence of Egypt and the Canal, in maintaining which he was recommended if possible to advance as far as El Arish on the eastern side of the Sinai Peninsula—still within the Egyptian frontier—and maintain his front there. I at once raised with the War Office the question of allowing him to embark on a further campaign into Palestine when El Arish had been secured, and on my instructions Sir William Robertson wired to Murray on 9th December, 1916, asking him to submit plans for an advance beyond El Arish, and state what additional troops he would require to execute them. The text of the telegram was as follows:—

"To-day Prime Minister mentioned to me desirability of making your operations as successful as possible. I am in entire agreement. Wire précis of action proposed beyond El Arish, stating what additional troops you would require for advance, if any. I cannot help thinking that in view of importance of achieving big success

on Eastern Front, and the effect this will have, you might risk having fewer troops on Western.\* A success is badly needed, and your operations promise well."

Sir Archibald Murray, who was at that time making a careful preparation for an advance upon El Arish, replied giving an account of his prospective movements, and saying that after taking El Arish he proposed to advance to Rafah, on the Syrian frontier, complete the clearing of the Sinai Peninsula, and then, if circumstances permitted, move against Beersheba, where the enemy's main concentration appeared to be. He asked if he could have two divisions from Mesopotamia and any spare mounted troops there were in Mesopotamia or India, assuming that nothing could be spared from France.

The C.I.G.S. answered saying:—

"Your telegram, 10th December, has been seen by Prime Minister, who wishes you to make maximum possible effort during the winter. Until the spring we cannot send any troops from Mesopotamia, and if you need reinforcements before then they must be drawn either from France or Salonika. . . ."

He went on to ask when the two extra divisions would be needed; could Murray water so large a force as six divisions and cavalry, and what enemy forces did he expect to meet?

Sir Archibald Murray replied that he would have liked one division at once, for his advance on El Arish, but would carry on without it. He would want the second division by 15th February for the advance to Beersheba. He did not expect that the hot weather would bring his operations to an end.

This last prospect alarmed the War Office. They had been prepared to acquiesce in a winter campaign, for which any extra troops needed could be released without impairing the supplies for a summer campaign in France. But if the fighting in Palestine were to involve a permanent call on further divisions, and on drafts and supplies to keep them in full fighting form through the summer, it would encroach on the troops intended for General Haig. He would have fewer men for the swamps of Passchendaele. So Robertson wired to Murray:—

"In order that any possibility of misunderstanding may be removed, *I wish to make it clear that notwithstanding the instructions recently sent to you to the effect that you should make your maximum effort during the winter, your primary mission remains unchanged, that is to say, it is the defence of Egypt. You will be informed if and when the War Cabinet changes this policy.*"

\* The Western frontier of Egypt.



Sir Archibald Murray went ahead with the forces at his disposal, pressing forward to El Arish on 21st December, to find it already abandoned by the Turks. He then carried out two highly successful attacks upon their forces at Magdhaba and Rafah. By the first, fought on 23rd December, 1916, he virtually cleared the Sinai Peninsula of the enemy. He captured 1,282 prisoners. By the Rafah victory he established himself on the Palestine frontier. Enemy killed and prisoners totalled over 1,800. Our own killed and wounded were 487.

At both of these actions we also secured a considerable military booty in the shape of guns, rifles, ammunition, stores, horses, mules and camels. The whole operation proved with what a miserable bluff we had been held in impotent futility on the Canal for over two years, whilst our troops in the Dardanelles and Mesopotamia were being defeated by the real Turkish Armies.

Sir William Robertson was most anxious to avert the danger of any troops being sent from France to Palestine, and on 29th December, 1916, he submitted a memorandum to the War Cabinet, in which, referring to my proposal for a Palestine campaign, having for its object the capture of Jerusalem, he urged:—

“In the opinion of the General Staff, an offensive in Syria should not be undertaken until next autumn, and in the meanwhile our commitments in the minor theatres should be reduced to the minimum in order that our maximum effort may be made in France. At the same time, we should complete our preparations in Egypt for an offensive in Syria in the autumn of 1917.

If the War Cabinet approves this policy, Sir A. Murray will be directed to establish himself in such a position as can be held defensively during the summer with the minimum force and is at the same time suitable as a starting-point for an offensive campaign in the autumn. He should be told that as many troops as can be spared from India, Mesopotamia and East Africa will be sent to him as soon as circumstances permit, and instructed to be ready to send such white troops as he can spare, after the beginning of March, to France.”

This memorandum was considered by the War Cabinet on 2nd January, 1917, and we decided to accept, in principle, the recommendation of the General Staff. The French were at the time pressing us to take over more of their line, to set their troops free for the Nivelle offensive, and while Sir Archibald Murray had set his requirements at two more divisions, the General Staff estimated that he would need three, which could not be spared if the plans agreed for the summer offensive on the Western Front were adhered to. It was part of Sir William Robertson's strategy to exaggerate the numbers

of the Turkish forces opposed to us in Palestine and Mesopotamia in order to deter us from ordering an advance in that quarter. As a matter of fact, it was within his knowledge at that hour that the forces at Murray's disposal considerably exceeded those of the Turks, both in number of men and equipment. This knowledge he withheld from the Cabinet.

There were at this time, as I have already stated, about 30,000 Turkish troops in Southern Syria. Their force which took part in the first Battle of Gaza, in March, 1917, numbered 16,000 rifles.

As regards the proposal for more troops from India to reinforce the Egyptian Army in the autumn, the War Cabinet decided that the Secretary of State for India and the Secretary of State for War must make all necessary arrangements for pressing forward the raising of the new Indian battalions, so that they might be ready by August for the operations mentioned in the Note of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

The situation was somewhat complicated by the desire of the French to put a finger in any Palestinian pie that might be baking. They had an interest in Syria and North Palestine. The agreement as to respective spheres of interest in Asia Minor, prepared by Sir Mark Sykes under Sir Edward Grey's instructions, and by M. Georges Picot, under orders from the Quai d'Orsay, and confirmed by the British Government in May, 1916, had placed the region from Acre to Aleppo in the French sphere. It was a fatuous arrangement, judged from any and every point of view. Under this Sykes-Picot Agreement, Russia was to push her frontier south-westwards into Asia Minor, taking in Armenia, Erzerum, Trebizond and northern Kurdistan. France was to be allowed to annex a strip of Asia Minor west of the new Russian frontier, running down to Adana and the Gulf of Alexandretta, and continuing along the Syrian coast to the north of Palestine. Britain was to be given Mesopotamia from the Persian Gulf to north of Baghdad; also the ports of Haifa and Acre in Palestine. France was to set up an Arab Kingdom or group of kingdoms in the Syrian hinterland, over which she would establish a sphere of influence, and Britain was to do the same in Transjordan, southern Palestine and Arabia. Palestine was cut up into sections, the centre to be placed under a special regime established by an arrangement between France, Russia and Britain. This impracticable plan was at first kept carefully secret from Italy, but when she learned of it she promptly put in a claim for the remainder of south-west Asia Minor, including Smyrna. Sir Mark Sykes never approved of the plan. It was forced upon him by the Foreign Office. Needless to say, the proposed partition could not be adhered to when the Peace Treaty was being prepared. But it warranted the French claiming a special interest in Syria, so that when we proposed an advance in that direction, the French suggested that they had

better co-operate. But our General Staff were opposed on principle to involving us in the complexities of yet another composite expedition, with the resulting problems of plurality of command and discipline, and in any event we did not want a French Army in Egypt, as this might have induced political complications. On 15th December, 1916, the War Cabinet, discussing the proposed campaign, decided to notify the French of our intention to press on with operations which might involve tribes within their sphere of influence, and at the same time to assure them that our sole object in this was the defeat of Turkey, and that we should welcome their political co-operation in any negotiations which might arise affecting that sphere. At the Anglo-French Conference held in London on 28th December, 1916, M. Ribot offered to attach a French battalion to our force, so as to show the French flag. I postponed the acceptance of this offer until our troops should be entering Palestine. I also agreed that a French Political Mission should then join our force. In due course both of these steps were taken. An Anglo-French Political Mission, under Sir Mark Sykes and M. Picot joined our expedition in April, 1917, and small detachments of French and Italian troops were added to it in May. In the following year, when the campaign through northern Palestine to Damascus and on to Aleppo was in prospect, the French force was considerably increased. But in 1917, it was little more than a "token" force.

The decision that troops for an advance on Jerusalem could not be supplied to him until the autumn was telegraphed to Sir Archibald Murray by the C.I.G.S. on 11th January, 1917. Eleven days later, he was ordered to give up one of his four divisions, and send it to France. With his depleted army, he kept up his pressure against the Turks, but found it hard to get them to join action against him. The War Office doubtless hoped that he would be unable to launch any operation which would involve us in further commitments to this "side-show." On 30th January, I asked the C.I.G.S. how his arrangements were progressing for the autumn campaign, and instructed him to report to the War Cabinet "as to the preparations that were being made for operations from Egypt against Turkey as soon as local climatic conditions render them feasible." Robertson records in his book "Soldiers and Statesmen" the grumble which this request provoked. His view was that we could not make plans so long ahead.

Sir Archibald Murray, who was running a railway line across the desert of Sinai, and bringing a pipe for water, wished to defeat the enemy forces in front of him, to ensure the safety of his rail-head from an attack by them. So in the latter part of March he pressed forward towards Gaza, and on 26th March he launched an attack on the Turkish forces in that town. The attack, which was directed by Sir Archibald Murray from his headquarters at Cairo, was badly



fumbled, so that the troops were withdrawn without capturing the town, though it was practically within their grasp. But the operation showed that definite successes were possible for us on this front, on a scale which we could hardly hope for anywhere else. More resolute and skilful leadership would undoubtedly have realised a success, which might have had a decisive influence on the Palestine campaign and in conjunction with Maude's victory might have ended in the collapse of Turkey in 1917. With an unimaginative and stubborn soldier at the centre and a nervous and over-cautious soldier in Egypt, the opportunity was missed. Had Maude been in Egypt, he would have broken the Turkish lines and captured Jerusalem by Easter, 1917.

On 2nd April, the War Cabinet devoted the afternoon to an examination of the prospects in Palestine. We realised the moral and political advantages to be expected from an advance on this front, and particularly from the occupation of Jerusalem. After full discussion, we passed a resolution that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff should inform the General Officer Commanding the Egyptian Expeditionary Force that we were very anxious to exploit the successes already achieved to the utmost possible extent, and to capture Jerusalem; that he should ask Sir Archibald Murray to state definitely whether he intended to advance along the route of the existing Turkish railway direct on Jerusalem, or to proceed by the coast route to Jaffa, or to utilise both routes; and that he should invite Sir Archibald Murray to give a full estimate of his requirements in men, guns and transport, in order to ensure the occupation of Jerusalem.

This resolution clearly indicates a readiness on the part of the War Cabinet to give Murray further reinforcements for his task. But the C.I.G.S. in communicating our decision to him, appears to have informed him that no more reinforcements would be forthcoming. Sir Archibald's dispatch records in regard to this communication:—

"I was informed that the War Cabinet relied on me to pursue the enemy with all the rapidity compatible with the necessary progress of my communications, and was anxious that I should push my operations with all energy, *though at the same time no additional troops were to be sent to me*, since it was considered that, in view of the military situation of the enemy, my present force would suffice."

The Minutes of the War Cabinet at this time contain no suggestion that we took that view of his forces.

However, he continued with his offensive plans, and having failed to carry Gaza by his surprise attack, he made careful preparations for a further assault, which took place on 17th April. But meantime the

Turkish forces had been reinforced, and the action had to be broken off on 20th April without achieving its object.

In reviewing the course of this campaign on 23rd April, the War Cabinet came to the conclusion that it was desirable to introduce more resolute leadership into the command of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, and with the concurrence of the War Secretary and the C.I.G.S., decided to make a change in the chief Command of this Army. In regard to the choice of a successor to Sir Archibald Murray, it was pointed out that General Smuts had expressed very decided views as to the strategical importance of Palestine to the future of the British Empire. He would therefore be likely to prosecute a campaign in that quarter with great determination, and there was a strong feeling that he would be one of the most suitable selections for the Chief Command of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

On the other hand, the War Cabinet were aware that there was a growing opinion in favour of the retention of General Smuts in a central position in this country, with a view to the utilisation of his great qualities in the higher conduct of the War.

General Smuts was a standing disproof of the theory tenaciously held by the British War Office (despite the classic example of Oliver Cromwell to the contrary) that no one was competent to hold high military command without long training in the regular army.

The career of General Smuts furnishes a practical demonstration of the absurdity. He was a lawyer by profession. But in the Boer War he was able with untrained troops to hold at bay for years the best military brains that our War Office could find to put against him, with the resources of the Empire behind them. In British East Africa he showed himself a brilliantly efficient, resourceful and energetic Commander-in-Chief of our forces. Had he consented to take in hand the Palestine campaign, I have not the least doubt that it would, under his charge, have been one of our most successful efforts.

The Imperial War Cabinet concluded its meetings on 2nd May. As I have already related, I had asked General Smuts to stay on for a time in this country, as I felt he was too useful a man to be let go. Arising out of our Cabinet discussion, I asked him if he would undertake the High Command in Palestine. He asked for time in which to consider the matter, but eventually he wrote to me declining the post. His own account of this incident is as follows:—

“The Prime Minister was immensely interested in this war front. He was strongly under the impression that Palestine might be made a decisive feature of the War; that Turkey might be broken and sent out of the War, and that this might be the beginning of the end for the whole German Front. He was very anxious

that a determined offensive should be made in Palestine, and it was with that object in view that he offered me the command. I considered the matter carefully at the time, and then consulted with Sir William Robertson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, about the offer that had been made to me. I asked Sir William what he thought about the matter, and he said to me, quite frankly, that if I were to accept the offer under the impression that something first-class could be done in Palestine, I would be making a great mistake, and he would dissuade me from accepting the command under such an impression. He said that it had been an obsession with Mr. Lloyd George for a long time that the War was to be won on one or other of the minor fronts and not on the Western Front. Mr. Lloyd George, he said, was for ever talking of concentrating on some other front in order to win the War, but the Military Authorities were entirely opposed to that view, and every first-class soldier was agreed that the War could only be won on the main front, i.e., the Western; and he thought it would be a great mistake to weaken our effort on that front in order to make a splash elsewhere. He thought that Palestine could at best remain only a "side-show," and whatever success I could achieve there would not materially affect the fortunes of the War.

The impression Sir William Robertson made on my mind was that I would not have the support of the War Office in getting the necessary men and material that would be wanted to make a first-class push in Palestine, and that if I went there I would probably be shut up there for the rest of the War. Mr. Lloyd George would have the full obstruction of the War Office in any of his efforts to help me, and I might be left stranded there. In view of the attitude of the War Office, I finally declined the offer. Mr. Lloyd George often afterwards told me that I had made a great mistake, and it is a question whether he was not right, because I saw afterwards how tremendously keen he remained on this Palestine question; and it is quite possible that if I had undertaken the job in May, 1917, something quite spectacular might have been done long before it was actually done by Allenby in the autumn of 1918, and it is quite conceivable that the War might have been shortened appreciably by a breakdown of the Turkish forces on the Palestine Front."

General Srouts' letter to me, dated 31st May, 1917, declining the Palestine Command, explained that:—

"The most careful consideration has only strengthened my first impression that the Palestine campaign will be a mistake unless at least the capture of Jerusalem is made a reasonable certainty, and all the reinforcements necessary for that purpose are assured. A



limited advance which stopped short of the capture of Jerusalem, would serve no particular purpose, and might easily be a disappointment to the public and appear as a fresh failure. . . .”

General Smuts remained here as a member of the War Cabinet—a step which secured general approval, though it called forth some indignant protests from members of my Ministry, who were horrified at the unprecedented step I was taking.

Mr. Walter Long deemed it necessary to enter a protest as Colonial Secretary. In his opinion “it was quite clear that Smuts could only join for Military questions. This appears to raise all sorts of difficulties.”

He suggested that “the simplest and best plan would be to make him a Member of the Imperial General War Staff. You could then arrange for him to attend whenever you like, or indeed, always and there could be no difficulty. It is obvious you can’t give him a voice in the settlement of general questions affecting, as they all do, Canada, Australia, New Zealand. . . .”

Meantime, in view of Murray’s second failure in front of Gaza, Sir William Robertson secured the consent of the War Cabinet to a modification of the instructions sent to him. Murray was no longer required to press on at once towards Jerusalem, but merely to take every favourable opportunity of defeating the Turkish forces opposed to him, and to follow up with all the means at his disposal any success gained, with the object of driving the Turks from Palestine as and when this should become practicable. I however came to the conclusion that with Murray in command no results could be expected and I pressed Robertson to find a more enterprising Commander. He recommended General Allenby. I heartily concurred in his recommendation. I felt that his experience and qualities as a cavalry leader specially fitted him for the Palestinian campaign.

On 5th June, 1917, the War Cabinet decided, in view of General Smuts’ rejection of the offer of the command, that General Allenby should be appointed as Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in Egypt, and that arrangements should be made for him to take over the Command as soon as possible. The policy to be adopted in that theatre of war would not be settled until General Allenby had assumed control.

Before Allenby left for Egypt, I had an interview with him and impressed on him that we wanted a determined attack to be pushed against the Turks, with the object of driving them out of Palestine. They were known to be getting war-weary, and a succession of defeats might well drive them out of the War altogether. I told him in the presence of Sir William Robertson that he was to ask us for such reinforcements and supplies as he found necessary, and we

would do our best to provide them. "If you do not ask it will be your fault. If you do ask and do not get what you need it will be ours." I said the Cabinet expected "Jerusalem before Christmas."

There is one further incident in connection with this interview which is worth recording. The late Sir William Robertson Nicoll had presented me with a copy of Sir George Adam Smith's volumes on Palestine. I had read these with absorbing interest, and I was struck by his detailed survey of the country from the point of view of the geographical difficulties it presented to an invader. I was convinced that this work was a better guide to a military leader whose task was to reach Jerusalem than any survey to be found in the pigeon holes of the War Office. Allenby afterwards acknowledged that it was invaluable to him for the accuracy of its information about the contour of the country.

On reaching Egypt, Allenby obtained an "appreciation" of the position from General Chetwode which showed that the enemy had now under Falkenhayn's direction strongly fortified Gaza, reinforced their army, and were holding a front from that place to Beersheba. As the Turks had now upwards of five divisions defending the front, an attacking force would need a definite superiority if it could hope to break through and follow up its success. So that we required seven infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions for an offensive. We were not informed that the Turkish divisions were considerably inferior in numbers to ours.

Allenby wired to the War Office on 12th July for two further divisions and further artillery to bring his force up to this standard. At the moment we could not send these as all the available troops at home were stuck in the mire in and around Passchendaele. But we asked him to reckon the 75th Division—then being gradually formed in Egypt—as one of the two, and on 10th August were able to inform him that we had the consent of the French to withdraw a division from Salonika and send it to Egypt. In any case, July and August were very hot months in Palestine, when military operations had to be virtually suspended. General Allenby was also informed on 10th August that his instructions were to strike the Turks as hard as possible during the coming autumn and winter, no geographical objective being set as the limit for his advance.

The spirit of the troops in Palestine had been greatly improved by Allenby's arrival. They knew that he had been sent for the purpose of breaking the deadlock before Gaza, and pressing forward to victory. He decided that in order effectively to organise and direct the attack it was necessary that he should himself be at the front with the Army, instead of directing them from Cairo, where Sir Archibald Murray had kept his headquarters, and he established his G.H.Q. near Khan Yunis, between Rafah and Gaza. Throughout August

and September he was completing the very elaborate arrangements necessary for furnishing supplies—particularly water—to the troops in their advance, and moving them into position. Best of all, perhaps, Allenby was not wedded to the fantastic obsession which dominated the War Office and Headquarters in France, that the best place to attack the enemy was at his strongest point. In the Turkish Front from Gaza to Beersheba, Gaza itself had now become a formidable fortress, on which a frontal attack could only be made with very heavy casualties, and Allenby decided to strike instead at Beersheba, the most distant but weakest part of the line, and turn Gaza, instead of sacrificing men in an effort to capture it by direct assault. It is characteristic of a certain type of military mind that in spite of the success of his plan he has been severely blamed for this strategy in some military quarters, and the "Gaza school" have insisted that his proper course was to attack on that nearest and strongest point.

Towards the end of October he started to move his troops eastward in earnest; and as he had previously carried out sundry reconnaissances in force, the Turks did not realise that he was really preparing an attack on the remote Beersheba end of their line—they still expected it to fall on Gaza. He feigned preparations in that direction, which misled the Turks. On 31st October, Beersheba was carried by assault, and the eastern end of the Turkish Front turned. Then, while this end of the enemy line was being rolled back, Allenby pressed up on Gaza, which the enemy abandoned on 7th November, and after a couple of days' fighting broke into rapid retreat, pursued by the British forces, till they were driven behind the Jaffa-Jerusalem line. Allenby avoided a direct assault on Jerusalem, which he captured by encircling it. When they found the city was doomed, the Turkish defenders hastily evacuated it, and it surrendered on 9th December, 1917.

The achievement was of immense importance, alike on military and on sentimental grounds. From a military standpoint it disintegrated the Turkish concentration at Aleppo which had been intended to carry out, under Falkenhayn's direction, a great campaign for the recovery of Baghdad and the restoration of Turkish and German control of the pathway to Persia. Thereafter the Turks did some successful campaigning in Trans-Caucasia against the disorganised relics of the Russian forces, but they were unable to regain a foothold in Mesopotamia, or in Southern Palestine. They were in fact so much broken by defeat that if we had been able to follow up our victory with larger forces we might soon have driven them out of the War. Our 600,000 casualties in the fiascos on the Western Front had so depleted our resources in men that we could no longer exploit victory on any front, but the moral effect of the victory was tremendously important. It cheered our own people at a critical time, when defeatist elements were making their influence felt among



us. It greatly encouraged our American Allies. And among that great international fraternity, the Jewish race, it was an earnest of the fulfilment of the Balfour Declaration, made on 9th November, 1917, that we favoured "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."

The attitude of the War Office towards this historic triumph is exemplified by the fact that whereas they ordered all the bells of London to ring out chimes of joy over the muddled tank-attack of Cambrai, not a flag was hoisted to call attention to the capture by British troops of the most famous city in the world which had for centuries baffled the efforts of Christendom to regain possession of its sacred shrines.

The question arose as to how far and how promptly this success could be further exploited. The War Office, which objected to this "side-show," had all along tried to discourage it by suggesting that we could not spare any more troops for it, and that with the troops at his disposal, Allenby could not meet the possible concentration of the enemy. Somewhat before this, on 5th October, Sir William Robertson had telegraphed to Allenby, saying that the War Cabinet would like him to advance to the Jaffa-Jerusalem line, and asking him what troops he wanted for the operation, bearing in mind that two German Divisions were reported to be preparing to join the big Turkish concentration at Aleppo. Apparently this warning, and the other information supplied to Allenby by the War Office and other intelligence sources, gave him the impression that he would have 20 divisions against him, and he asked for his own force to be made up to a similar strength—i.e. by a further 13 divisions. That was a reinforcement which we could not just then provide for him, and I also felt certain that the demand had been elicited by a War Office exaggeration of the strength of the forces he would have to meet—as events proved to be the case. We know now that the forces at Allenby's disposal were overwhelmingly superior to any the Turks could muster, and that if he had pressed forward, there was no Turkish Army that could offer any substantial resistance. The German general who was Chief of the Staff of the Turkish Army facing Jerusalem, reported to Liman von Sanders, who took over the supreme command of the Turks in Palestine early in 1918, that there were only 3,900 rifles available for the defence of a 16-mile front. Most of the divisions were reduced to an average strength of about 1,500 rifles. If these facts were known to Allenby at that time, it is incredible that he should not have taken full advantage of the Turkish right without any loss of time. I cannot however help conjecturing that his caution was not due to any fear of being beaten by this miserable remnant of a defeated army, but rather to his dread of the consequences of brushing aside the restraining hand from Whitehall. Valuable time was lost, and it took nine or ten months to

accomplish what could have been achieved in two or three. It enabled the Turk to last out almost to the end, and to hold up hundreds of thousands of British troops.

After the fall of Jerusalem, the War Cabinet decided to send the following message to Allenby:—

“In view of the change in position created by your recent victory over Turks, and by revised information as to enemy's strength and breakdown in his transport, War Cabinet would like to have your opinion by telegram as soon as possible as to the manner in which, and extent to which, it is possible to exploit your success in Palestine with forces now under your command, plus the division under orders for Mesopotamia.”

On the following day, 13th December, we instructed the General Staff to submit for consideration a project for carrying out the following alternative policies:—

(a) Complete the conquest of the whole of Palestine, and hold the country for the remainder of the War.

(b) Continue the advance through Palestine and Syria to the vicinity of Aleppo, so as permanently to interrupt railway communication with Mesopotamia.

This request was also passed on by the C.I.G.S. to Allenby for his comments.

General Allenby sent back word that for the moment he could do little on account of the rains—which that winter were particularly heavy in Palestine, and caused serious difficulty to the transport. If limited to his existing force, he expected to have cleared the whole of Palestine and established his line well on the way to Damascus by June or July, 1918. To advance to Aleppo, if it were strongly held by the enemy, would necessitate a force of 16 divisions in addition to his cavalry.

The War Office was very much opposed to any such extension of our Turkish campaign, and mustered all the arguments it could find against it. On the other hand, the Supreme War Council at Versailles favoured the plan of acting on the defensive in the West until the American Army was ready, while we proceeded to knock out the Turks, and thus make a breach in the front of the Central Powers. In order to get an independent view, the War Cabinet decided, on 28th January, 1918, to depute General Smuts to proceed to Egypt with full power on their behalf to confer with Generals Allenby and Marshall, or their representatives, the Naval Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, the Government of Egypt, and any other authorities in regard to the military situation in the Middle East, and

to advise the War Cabinet as soon as possible on the best use and co-ordination of all our resources in that theatre, with a view to the most vigorous prosecution of the war against Turkey.

General Smuts proceeded to the East and after holding consultations with our leaders there, reported on 15th February in favour of making the Mesopotamia force act on the defensive, and concentrating on a thrust by Allenby up towards Aleppo. The Cabinet agreed to adopt this policy. But before it could be carried into effect, the German break-through on the Western Front compelled us to muster all our available forces to resist their attacks there. General Allenby had captured Jericho in February, 1918, and in March and April he carried out a couple of raids into Trans-Jordania. Thereafter the lack of reinforcements and the hot weather brought operations to a standstill until September. In September and October he made a brilliant sweep through Damascus and Aleppo, which knocked out the Turks and brought them to sue for an armistice.

Had this offensive been undertaken at an early stage in the War and properly supported from home, the Turkish collapse would have come sooner, and the repercussions in Europe would have been shattering.

It may however be remarked here with regard to the 1917 campaigns against the Turks, that their success proved to the hilt that the Turkish sector of the defences of the Central Powers was by far the most vulnerable point, and that it was the one where the training and experience of the British military forces could be put to much their best use. Yet the stubborn refusal of our military advisers to take advantage of the remarkable opportunities which were thus open to us, and their insistent concentration upon the most impenetrable fortresses of the Western Front, prevented us from scoring such a decisive success until the last moment.



## CHAPTER LVII

### CREATING THE AIR MINISTRY

PROMINENT among the contributions which the Great War made to technical progress was the immense development of the art and practice of flying which it fostered. When the War broke out, flying was still in its infancy. The first cross-channel flight by an aeroplane had been made only five years before by Blériot; and no British airman had yet covered 200 miles in a single flight. I witnessed one of the first flying exhibitions at Reims in the summer of 1909. The most famous airmen of France and America took part in the show. It was a beautiful summer's day, but a slight breeze was blowing most of the day, so that no aeroplane could fly. In the cool of the evening, the movement of the air subsided and there was a complete calm. The aeroplanes took advantage of this atmospheric improvement to circle round. The Royal Flying Corps was only established in 1912, with a military and a naval wing, and up to the outbreak of the War the military wing confined its studies to the use of aircraft for reconnaissance. The possibilities of aircraft as auxiliaries to our fighting services had been quickly recognised by ourselves, as they had been by all the other armed Powers. But in those early days the machines in use were primitive, insecure, and still very much in the experimental stage. They were being developed as ancillary aids to our forces on land and sea, mainly, if not entirely, for purposes of observation. Their organisation was not based on a recognition that to these age-old spheres of conflict there had now been added a third—the battlefield of the air.

To the infant invention of aviation, the War proved to be a forcing-house of tropical intensity. Fertilised by a stintless outpouring of life, of treasure, and of technical research in every belligerent country, it progressed more rapidly in the four years of war than it might have done in a score of years of peace. As the War proceeded its possibilities of independent use became steadily more obvious. And as in the West the deadlock of trench warfare on the ground developed, we came to devote increasing attention to a battlefield where no trenches could be dug, no minefields sown. Had the War persisted a few months longer, we should have hurled ruin from the air on to the chief cities of Central Europe. Doubtless our own capitals would also have suffered their share of disaster.

From that red sowing, the world has since reaped in peace the immense advantages of civil aviation on a wide commercial scale. (This, too, is still an infant, though a sturdy one.) And if the possibilities of aerial attack in time of war now add to life a new menace of incalculable horror, the developments of air transport are playing in time of peace a part in promoting international intercourse, in the over-leaping of frontiers, in establishing new links between one country and another, which may help to avert those conflicts whose horrors they would so intensify.

I have here to sketch briefly the steps we took to establish in Britain an organisation which should be able to make the fullest use of the new weapon of aircraft in war, and should be adapted later on to the task of turning it to the arts of peace.

Even before the War, the naval and military wings of the Royal Flying Corps tended to diverge. There was no central policy for the Air, and as the new arm was ancillary only to the established defence services, it was developed by them in terms of their conception of the help it could render their respective operations. The War Office saw chiefly the reconnaissance possibilities of aircraft. At the Admiralty, the fertile brains of Mr. Churchill and Lord Fisher conceived wider uses for it. Lord Fisher took an alarmist view of the ultimate possibilities of the Zeppelin. I recollect a paper written by him in 1915 in which he depicted the gruesome spectacle of a ton of explosives dropped from the clouds on to the Horse Guards Parade, and destroying in one shattering explosion all the historic buildings surrounding that square, with the Admirals, Generals, Statesmen, and Civil Servants under the ruins "in one red burial blent." He counselled anticipation of this fell blow.

In 1913, the Admiralty decided to adopt for the naval wing a threefold use of seaplanes—for coast defence and patrol, for scouting as eyes of the Fleet, and as attacking and bombing planes operating from battleships. So when the Expeditionary Force went across to France, it took all its military planes with it for scouting purposes, and we had to rely alike for the air defence of Britain and for raiding and bombing the air bases of the enemy, where their Zeppelins were housed, on the machines of the Naval Air Service—tasks which Mr. Churchill cheerfully undertook and vigorously pursued. He accepted on 3rd September, 1914, at Lord Kitchener's request, the charge of our home air defence, and, on the principle that attack was the best form of defence, he flung planes across to Dunkirk to raid enemy air bases. Out of this grew a large independent development of naval air activity, leading to the organisation of the Royal Naval Air Service as a quite distinct body from the Royal Flying Corps. To quote the first Report of the Air Board, in October, 1916:—

"... Before the War, as is well known, there was no

independent Naval Air Service or organisation at all. There were a military and naval wing of a joint Service. Mr. Churchill took the Naval Air Service into his own hands, and, though the Fourth Sea Lord was nominally responsible, ran it himself on vigorous but unorthodox lines. When he resigned, it became for the first time a subordinate branch of the Admiralty, reorganised on naval lines, under an Admiral, with naval heads of the personnel and technical branches."

We soon found that there were several grave drawbacks to this aerial dichotomy. The two air services, naval and military, were competing with each other for the available supplies of aero engines—many of which were at that stage only procurable from France. They were competing rather than pooling their experiments and inventions in regard to technical improvements. The Navy, being at once the senior Service and an essentially mechanised service, started with a priority of claim on available resources, and a superior array of mechanical talent. There was a good deal of bombing by the naval aeroplanes on the Belgian coast. There was no authenticated record of any hits which demolished German craft or works, but Belgian towns were undoubtedly damaged, some Belgian civilians killed, and the rest terrorised. The aviators of the Army were far more constantly and crucially engaged in vital operations of an obsessing kind. Concentration on the use of aeroplanes as hand-maids to the operations of fleets and armies meant a failure to develop their possibilities as an independent arm, and even left it uncertain which of the two branches should properly undertake such tasks as the defence of London against attacks by Zeppelins and German aeroplanes, or the carrying out of reprisal raids on German towns. In short, the net result of this division of responsibility for our flying services was overlapping, inefficiency, and a seriously swelling casualty list.

The immunity with which the German airships rode across Britain dropping destructive bombs exasperated public sentiment. There were ominous rumblings in Parliament and in the Press, and in February, 1916, Mr. Asquith sought to remedy the state of affairs by setting up a joint War Air Committee, presided over by Lord Derby, "to collaborate in arranging questions of supplies and design for the material of the Naval and Military Air Services, upon such points as will be referred to it by the War Committee, the Admiralty, the War Office, or any other Department of State." Shortly afterwards the strength of popular feeling on the need for a better development of our air services found vent in the return of Mr. Pemberton Billing as an Independent Member for East Herts, on the strength of his advocacy of more efficiency in the air.

The Joint War Air Committee had a short life. The Admiralty



showed that it had not the slightest intention of permitting any interference by such a body with its independent control of the R.N.A.S. and its supplies. After a couple of months of disheartenment and frustration, Lord Derby, the Chairman, and Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, the independent member of the Committee, both resigned, and the Committee collapsed. Lord Derby stated as his reasons that the Committee had no executive power and no authority; that a fundamental difference was found to exist between the two branches of the air service, each having its own organisation, *esprit de corps*, and aspirations, and that the Committee was debarred by its terms of reference from discussing any question of policy.

Lord Curzon in the spring of 1916, proposed the setting up of a more authoritative body. Something, he urged, must be done to improve the situation:—

“ . . . After nearly 21 months of war our fighting planes are inferior to German machines, and for the time we have ceased to hold the mastery of the air. Though we are now turning out some splendid new machines, we are still working at the front with a majority of old types, and our men are liable to be outclassed and outpaced by the enemy. . . . As regards the relations between the two branches of the service, so imperfect has been the co-ordination that, not merely are designs competed for and machines ordered, but operations have sometimes been undertaken without any intercommunication. Each service still claims the right to conduct long-range offensive operations, and therefore to acquire the high-power engines for the purpose. The evidence is incontestable that there has been a great lack of co-operation, and a competition, often the reverse of advantageous, between the two services. . . . ”

He urged that the proper course would be the establishment of an Air Ministry, but admitted that this would be resisted by the Admiralty, and might give rise to friction and ill-will; and suggested as a secondary course the setting-up of an Air Board with real powers. Mr. Balfour, who as the spokesman for the Lords of the Admiralty, acted throughout this controversy as the persistent opponent of every proposal for co-ordination, retorted in a memorandum skilfully massing every possible argument against a change. But after further exchanges of memoranda and counter-memoranda, Mr. Asquith decided to set up an Air Board. Lord Kitchener stated that the Army Council “ would welcome and would be prepared to support a Board constituted on the lines suggested ” by Lord Curzon. Mr. Balfour on behalf of the Admirals reiterated his objections. The establishment of the Board was announced in the House of Commons on 17th May, 1916. Lord Curzon was appointed its chairman, and

it consisted of two naval, two military representatives, Lord Sydenham as independent expert, and Major Baird as Parliamentary Secretary. It was empowered to discuss and make representations to the Admiralty and War Office in regard to air policy and combined operations, and the types of machine required; to organise and co-ordinate the supply of material and prevent competition; and organise a system for interchange of ideas on technical developments.

The first Report of the Air Board was issued by Lord Curzon on 23rd October, 1916. It detailed what they had done and attempted to do since their formation, and then proceeded to recount the hopeless difficulties they had encountered in carrying out their appointed tasks through the persistent opposition of the Admiralty, of which a detailed and documented account was given. This opposition was making their work impossible.

“ . . . No expansion of the work of the Air Board, no complete fulfilment of the charge with which it was entrusted, and no adequate provision for the urgent necessities of the future, are, in our opinion, possible, so long as the Admiralty adopts its present attitude towards the Air Board, and so long as the administration of that branch of the Air Service which is in the hands of the Admiralty is conducted on the present lines. It is with no pleasure that my colleagues and I question the administration of a Department possessed of such splendid traditions, and with such a glorious record of service, as the Admiralty. But it is our profound conviction, for which we shall proceed to state the reasons, that the addition to the Navy of responsibilities for the air—not in itself necessarily impracticable—has, in the manner in which it has been carried out, been attended with results that have been equally unfortunate to the Navy and the Air Service, and, if persisted in, will be incompatible not merely with the existence of an Air Board, but with the immense and almost incalculable development that ought to lie before a properly co-ordinated and conducted Air Service in the future. . . . ”

As I have mentioned previously,\* this Report gave rise to what in other circumstances might have been viewed as a highly entertaining series of dialectical exchanges between Lord Curzon and Mr. Balfour. Lord Curzon was proposing that the Air Board should take charge, for both air services, of invention, research, experiment, design, production, inspection and finance. Mr. Balfour wanted to retain at the Admiralty the responsibility for all these functions so far as the R.N.A.S. was concerned. Mr. Montagu proposed that production for both services should be taken over by the Ministry of Munitions. After several meetings of the War Committee on the

\* Chap. XXXIV.

27th and 28th November, 1916, we reached the stage of putting down *draft* conclusions, but these were not finally confirmed when the Asquith coalition fell. The substance of these draft conclusions was as follows:—

The Ministry of Munitions should undertake design and supply of aeroplanes for both the Army and the Navy.

The Air Board should be definitely responsible for allocating our available aerial resources between the Admiralty and the War Office.

A Fifth Sea Lord should be appointed and added to the Air Board, which should also have a representative of the Ministry of Munitions.

The distribution of responsibility between the various authorities should be as follows:—

(a) The Admiralty and War Office will concert their respective aerial policies in consultation with the Air Board.

(b) The Admiralty and War Office will formulate the programmes of aerial production required for the fulfilment of the approved policy, and will submit these programmes to the Air Board.

(c) The Air Board will decide as to the extent to which it is possible to approve the departmental programmes, having regard to the possible rate of production, the needs of the other Department, and the respective urgency of the demands.

(d) The Air Board (Admiralty and War Office) will place the order with the Ministry of Munitions.

(e) The design of the machines and commodities ordered will be undertaken by the Ministry of Munitions, working in the closest possible association with the Department for whom the order is placed.

(f) The Ministry of Munitions will give every facility for direct communication on all matters of detail between the representatives of the Admiralty Air Department and the Department of the Director-General of Military Aeronautics respectively and the actual manufacturers.

(g) Any of the Departments represented on the Air Board, and the Air Board itself, will have the right of appeal to the War Committee in case of dispute."

This scheme proposed a very considerable move forward from the disorganised and unsatisfactory condition which was then obtaining. But Mr. Asquith's failure to clinch the issue at the War Committee by giving his final decision on the issue raised meant that we had still to settle it afresh under the new Government. On 15th December, Lord Curzon expressed in the War Cabinet a hope that the question might soon be settled. He was still acting as Chairman of the Air Board on its old basis, and wished to be relieved by its



reconstitution with a fresh Chairman holding new powers. But the First Sea Lord, Admiral Jellicoe, objected that he was still discussing the matter with the new First Lord, Sir Edward Carson, and would let us know as soon as they were ready for us to thrash it out.

We dealt with it on 22nd December, 1916. By this time the Admiralty had succeeded in kneading its new First Lord into full acceptance of its attitude, and the results of his education were shown in a long memorandum, arguing the utter impracticability of any attempt to co-ordinate the R.N.A.S. and R.F.C. under the supervision of the Air Board, and urging that the proposed steps in this direction should be limited to the fewest and smallest possible.

In the Cabinet discussion, there was an attempt to lure the Government into the old maze of arguments. Jellicoe "desired to express in the strongest terms his opinion that the policy of making the Admiralty dependent on another Department for the design and supply of aircraft would be disastrous." But I refused to allow the reopening of a question which had so exhaustively been examined by the late War Committee, and the Draft Conclusions were formally approved, Lord Curzon registering his dissent. The Air Board, Admiralty, and War Office were instructed to work out the details of the new arrangements in consultation with the Ministry of Munitions.

Lord Curzon's duties as a member of the War Cabinet made it impossible for him to continue to act as Chairman of the Air Board, and we appointed Lord Cowdray to this position. On 19th January, 1917, four weeks after our meeting of 22nd December, he was able to report a substantial measure of agreement, in a letter to me which ran as follows:—

" Air Board,  
19, Carlton House Terrace,  
London, S.W.

19th January, 1917.

Dear Prime Minister,

To-day the four departments concerned—Admiralty, War, Munitions and this Board—have arrived at an agreement as to their varied functions in connection with the Air Service.

I am thankful that I can thus report that the draft Charter, which will shortly be submitted to you for approval, will be an agreed document.

The Admiralty have insisted upon the lighter-than-air craft remaining with them. To this we could make no valid objection for the time being as it does not involve any conflict with the aeroplanes and seaplanes—and these are enough to occupy us for some time. The chances are that lighter-than-air craft will come our way shortly.

No time has been lost in getting on with the preliminaries for expediting and augmenting the supplies of aircraft.

Munitions Department have allotted two fine men (Weir and Martin) to these supplies.

I must express to you my appreciation of the help and support that Lord Derby and Dr. Addison have given me. The Admiralty have also assisted (always subject to their predisposition) in a way that deserves acknowledgment.

Believe me,

Yrs. v. sincerely,

COWDRAY."

A Technical Committee was to be set up under the Air Board to deal with design, thus eliminating the confusion and overlapping in this respect which had thus been described in the first report of the Air Board in October, 1916:—

"One of the first questions that attracted the attention of the Board was the unsatisfactory arrangement by which aeronautical inventions affecting the two Air Services are, under existing conditions, liable to be dealt with by one or other of five distinct bodies, namely:—

The Royal Naval Air Service.

The Royal Flying Corps.

The Board of Invention and Research.

The Munitions Inventions Department.

The Advisory Committee on Aeronautics.

It appeared to the Board that this state of things presented a double defect. In the first place it led to the same experimental work being undertaken twice over on behalf of the two departments; and, secondly, it involved the risk of a valuable invention being brought to the notice of only one of the two Departments whom it might interest."

The Royal Aircraft Factory at Farnborough was to be placed under the Ministry of Munitions for the manufacture of planes.

This scheme was duly adopted by the War Cabinet, and on 6th February, we were able to announce the composition of the reconstituted Air Board.

The little wars conducted behind the front between Departments, of which this is a sample out of many, caused serious delay and damage to our interests in the War. When I witnessed the energy and manœuvring displayed by those who were engaged in these internecine conflicts, I often wished it could have been concentrated and directed against the enemy.

At last peace was established and co-operation substituted for contention. Under the new arrangement, the design and production of aircraft were greatly improved and expedited—not before it was time, for at this period of the War the Germans were getting dangerously ahead of us in the mastery of the air. On 15th February, Sir Douglas Haig wrote warning us that the deliveries of aircraft promised by the Director of Air Organisation at the War Office were not being made, and that he was faced with a serious shortage.

“The position as regards fighting squadrons in particular is most serious. *Our fighting machines will almost certainly be inferior in numbers, and quite certainly in performance, to those of the enemy.* In view, therefore, of the marked increase in the number and efficiency of the German aeroplanes, it appears that we cannot expect to gain supremacy in the air in April, and it is even possible that it may pass to the enemy.

The seriousness of this situation cannot be overrated, and its possible effect on the results of our operations will no doubt be fully realised by the War Cabinet.”

This was the situation in which months of futile wrangling and competitive organisation had landed the air force. The military and naval authorities respectively had had things in their own hands, with this result. Once again we had to call in civilian aid to clear up the muddle.

The improvement which this new body effected is shown by the fact that two months later, on 17th April, 1917, they were able to report that the arrangements they had now set in operation were assuring a rapid multiplication of the output of improved types of aeroplane. The monthly deliveries of aero engines would be nearly  $2\frac{1}{2}$  times as many as they were in 1916 and during the next four months, July-October, the monthly production would be more than  $3\frac{1}{2}$  times that of 1916. The new Air Board pointed out that such an increase had not been possible under its predecessor, as the old system of divided responsibility between the naval and military air arms had prevented proper organisation of the national resources in this field.

Through the summer of 1917, the Air Board worked hard and efficiently at its tasks. At this time aircraft were assuming an importance far greater than they had hitherto possessed and coming rapidly to be regarded as formidable weapons of war. The Army in the field clamoured insatiably for larger supplies. At home, the German air raids on London and the south-eastern counties grew very frequent, and the damage and loss of life caused by them assumed serious proportions. There was no way of preventing these enemy planes from coming over. The most effective measure that



could be taken was to furnish a powerful air fleet for home defence, which might make air raids by the enemy too expensive in casualties by destroying large numbers of the invading planes; and to carry out reprisal raids on enemy cities on a scale which would convince them that this form of warfare was bad business. For both of these purposes, large numbers of planes were needed, independently of the requirements of either the Army or the Navy.

On 9th June, 1917, Lord Cowdray reported to me:—

‘The Air Board to-day is now turning out each week as many aircraft as were turned out in a month this time last year. By the end of the year it will be turning out fully ten times as many aircraft as it was doing in the summer months of 1916.’

In addition to the increase in numbers there was a marked improvement in power and efficiency.

But even this increase, creditable as it was, we felt to be inadequate to our growing needs, and on 14th June, the War Cabinet decided that a much increased programme of construction must be put in hand. The Air Board was ordered to prepare a scheme for this in consultation with the Ministry of Munitions and War Office, even at the expense of other important supplies of munitions. At this meeting we also decided, in view of the fact that a serious air raid had taken place on the previous day over Woolwich and Poplar, to concentrate for a short time a strong force of the best planes and pilots in this country, in order to give the next raiders a hot reception. Two squadrons were accordingly recalled temporarily from the Western Front and stationed near Canterbury and Calais respectively.

We carefully investigated the question of reprisal raids, but after full examination of the matter by experts, it was decided that we had not as yet a number of machines available of sufficient power and range to be able to embark upon a regular programme of long-distance bombing raids on German towns. And to carry out an isolated raid would only exasperate the German people and lead to an intensification of their attacks.

The two squadrons that had been temporarily withdrawn for home defence from the Western Front remained on guard for about three weeks, during which period the country was free from air attacks, except for one raid on Harwich. In point of fact, the weather was unsuitable for raids during this period, apart from the one day when the Harwich raid was carried out. On 6th July, Sir Douglas Haig recalled his two squadrons, as had been arranged. The next day was fine and clear, and in the middle of the morning a large fleet of German aeroplanes reached central London and dropped a number of bombs on the City and south of the Thames, killing and wounding numbers of people and causing a great deal of material damage.

There was grave and growing panic amongst the population in the East End where the attack had taken place. At the slightest rumour of approaching aeroplanes, tubes and tunnels were packed with panic-stricken men, women and children. Every clear night the commons around London were black with refugees from the threatened metropolis. It is right, however, to record the fact that the undoubted terror inspired by the death-dealing skies did not swell by a single murmur the demand for peace. It had quite the contrary effect. It angered the population of the stricken towns and led to a fierce demand for reprisals.

As a result of this last raid on the metropolis the Cabinet decided to recall two squadrons from the Western Front for home defence, and to ask Sir Douglas Haig if he could arrange a reprisal raid on Mannheim.

The figures which Sir William Weir was able to give us as to the rate of production of aero-engines showed that we should soon possess an air fleet much in excess of the necessary demands of the Army and Navy. But it would be some weeks before these would begin to take shape as additional trained squadrons. We decided to improve the arrangements for dealing with fires resulting from air raids, but in view of Sir Douglas Haig's protest against the withdrawal of two squadrons, we resolved to withdraw only one, and to abandon the proposal of raiding Mannheim for the present. We also decided to hold a secret session of Parliament that afternoon, at which we could lay the facts before the Commons and tell them our intentions.

At this secret session I explained to the House how matters stood. I gave them figures to show the way in which aeroplane construction was now being expedited, so that before long we should have an adequate supply both for our military operations and for home defence and independent attack. But until that time, I made it clear that our military requirements must have priority.

“The first consideration before the Government is to see that the Army in France is sufficiently supplied with aeroplanes. A sufficiency of aeroplanes means everything to that Army. They are the eyes of the Army, which cannot advance without them. By their means the Army discovers the enemy's trenches, guns and machine-gun emplacements. To photograph these requires air supremacy, and without that air supremacy it is sheer murder to allow troops to advance. . . . The slightest deficiency in the work of observation from the air, a single machine-gun emplacement overlooked, might in a few minutes mean the loss of thousands of gallant lives. The first duty of the country is to protect these men. The Germans realise the importance of this question quite as much as we do. The second means by which they are attempting to diminish our superiority is by trying to force us to withdraw our

machines from France in order to protect our own towns. If the Germans know that by bombing English towns they can force us to withdraw fighting squadrons from France, there could be nothing which would encourage them more. . . . If the aeroplanes can be provided for the Front and for our defence against raids, that will, of course, be done. If not, the Army must come first, and it is vitally important that the Germans should know it."

This statement satisfied the House.

But while the arrangements we made were as effective as our expert advisers could suggest, in terms of our existing organisation and resources, I felt that we must go far more thoroughly into the matter, with a view to ensuring the best possible use of the air weapon, alike for attack and for defence. It was a question that called for examination by a fresh and able mind, free from departmental prejudices. Fortunately such a mind was available. I asked General Smuts to investigate the problem of the air on behalf of the Cabinet. He consented, and on 11th July, the War Cabinet agreed that a Committee should be set up, consisting of myself and General Smuts, in consultation with:—

A representative of the Admiralty,

A representative of the General Staff,

A representative of the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, Home Forces,

and such other experts as we might desire.

Its terms of reference were:—

"To examine (1) the defensive arrangements for Home Defence against Air Raids, and (2) the existing general organisation for the study and higher direction of aerial operations."

As I was myself unremittingly busied with every phase of our national activities, I had to leave the chief burden of the work to General Smuts, and I kept in constant touch with him.

General Smuts went first of all into the question of the defence of London, on which he submitted his report to the War Cabinet on 19th July. He found that the success of the German raids was due in no small measure to causes which could be remedied. In the first place, although we really had a very large number of machines and personnel in the Air Services available to defend London, they were not unified, but were independently controlled by three or four different authorities, so that there was no organised co-operation between them, and the Germans could attack us without serious risk of counter-attack. The measures recommended by General Smuts and adopted by the War Cabinet were, in the first place, to secure



a unified command under a first-class officer of the whole defence forces against air attacks on London. General Ashmore was appointed for the purpose, and proved a most efficient officer. The available planes were combined into proper units, trained for fighting in flight formation, so as to meet the German attack in that form. Three or four squadrons were recommended for formation, which could deal with the enemy, not only over London, but also before London was reached. This was done, and the Germans, when next they attacked, found themselves opposed by forces equal to their own, in mass formation, before they reached London, and only isolated machines reached the metropolitan area at all. The anti-aircraft guns were also placed outside London in such a way as to meet the advancing planes with their fire before they reached London. Under the new organisation developed from General Smuts' recommendations, our air defences of London were rapidly transformed in strength and effectiveness. Daylight raids became too dangerous for the Germans to attempt, and night raids grew steadily more difficult and costly.

The second matter referred to this Committee—the question of air organisation generally and the higher direction of aerial operations—took longer to examine. In consultation with me, General Smuts set himself to consider the questions:—

1. Shall there be instituted a real Air Ministry responsible for all air organisation and operations?
2. Shall there be constituted a unified Air Service embracing both the present R.N.A.S. and R.F.C.?
3. If so, how shall the relations of the new Air Service to the Navy and Army be determined so that the functions at present discharged for them by the R.N.A.S. and R.F.C. respectively shall continue to be efficiently performed by the new Air Service

The second and final Report, presented by General Smuts on 17th August, 1917, contained an examination of these questions and a series of recommendations for their solution.

The Report noted briefly the controversies which had raged round this issue in the former War Committee. It paid tribute to the excellent work of the reconstituted Air Board, but pointed out that this body was really a Conference rather than a Board, being a consultative association of representatives of the Fighting Services and Ministry of Munitions, without a technical and advisory personnel of its own. Hence it could never form an independent air policy, but only one subordinated to military and naval strategy. The time was now rapidly approaching when such subordination could no longer be justified.

This passage from the Report has an important bearing on one of the most difficult problems of Disarmament:—

"Air Service . . . can be used as an independent means of war operations. Nobody that witnessed the attack on London on the 11th July could have any doubt on that point. Unlike artillery, an air fleet can conduct extensive operations far from, and independently of, both Army and Navy. As far as can at present be foreseen, there is absolutely no limit to the scale of its future independent war use. And the day may not be far off when aerial operations, with their devastation of enemy lands and destruction of industrial and populous centres on a vast scale, may become the principal operations of war, to which the older forms of military and naval operations may become secondary and subordinate. . . .

In our opinion there is no reason why the Air Board should any longer continue in its present form as practically no more than a conference room between the older Services, and there is every reason why it should be raised to the status of an independent Ministry in control of its own War Service.

. . . Next spring and summer the position will be that the Army and Navy will have all the Air Service required in connection with their operations; and over and above that, there will be a great surplus available for independent operations. Who is to look after and direct the activities of this available surplus? . . . The necessity for an Air Ministry and Air Staff has therefore become urgent.

. . . It requires some imagination to realise that next summer, while our Western Front may still be moving forward at a snail's pace in Belgium and France, the air battle front will be far behind on the Rhine, and that its continuous and intense pressure against the chief industrial centres of the enemy, as well as on his lines of communication, may form an important factor in bringing about peace. . . ."

The further argument was also adduced that with the progressive exhaustion of man-power on both sides, the importance of mechanised warfare would increase, and that the air arm multiplied immensely the potency of the individual combatant.

The report emphasised the chaos which would result from continuing the R.F.C. and R.N.A.S. independently of a new Air Force, and urged that it would suffice if the needs of the Army and Navy were specially studied by the Air Force, and those units attached to them were seconded to them and placed under their orders while operating on behalf of the older Services. It summed up its conclusions in eight recommendations:—

1. That an Air Ministry should be instituted forthwith, to administer all matters connected with aerial warfare.
2. That it should have an Air Staff to make plans, direct operations, collect intelligence and train personnel.

3. That the Ministry and Staff should arrange for the amalgamation of the R.N.A.S. and R.F.C.

4. That the personnel of these services should only be transferred to the new force with their own consent.

5. That close liaison should be established and maintained between the Army, Navy and Air Staffs.

6. That the Air Staff should provide air units for service with the Army and Navy, to act during such attachment under naval or military control, and with such types of machines as those services desired.

7. That regular officers of the Navy and Army should be seconded to the Air Force for fixed periods for employment with the naval and military air contingents.

8. That officers and other ranks should be able to transfer permanently to the Air Force if they wished.

This report was considered at length by the War Cabinet on 24th August. The official view of the Board of Admiralty, voiced on this occasion by Sir Eric Geddes, the new First Lord, was still doggedly opposed to any interference with the R.N.A.S. They suggested that the new Air Ministry should take over the R.F.C. and leave the R.N.A.S. alone.

Ultimately the War Cabinet, after the most careful consideration, decided to accept in principle the recommendations made in the Second Report of the Prime Minister's Committee on Air Organisation, as summarised in paragraph 10 of the Report.

This was the beginning of the Air Ministry. The first big fence had been cleared on the way to the setting up of such a Ministry, and the pressing forward of the scheme was recommitted to the capable hands of General Smuts. In the meantime we approved General Smuts' suggestion that a Committee should be appointed to assemble at once, composed as under, to advise the War Cabinet on all questions relating to Air policy:—

General Smuts (in the Chair),

The First Lord of the Admiralty,

The Secretary of State for War,

The President of the Air Board.

This was in order that we should not be held up, pending the carrying of legislation, in the adoption of measures to put our growing air strength to its fullest use. The Air Board, as Lord Cowdray stated at this meeting, had no policy beyond supplying the needs of the Army and Navy. By this time Sir Douglas Haig had 1,500 machines, besides the reserve of machines on the Western Front. The Admiralty also had 1,500 naval machines, with 500 seaplanes. A policy was needed for use of the surplus machines which might presently be available.



The announcement of our intention to establish an Air Ministry was made in the House of Commons on 16th October, and the Bill itself was given a first reading on 8th November. It had in the meantime been very carefully examined by the Departments concerned, and revised in consultation with them by the Air Committee under General Smuts, and by the War Cabinet. The almost impossible feat had been accomplished of securing substantial agreement with its terms by the Admiralty and War Office. It passed through Parliament without difficulty, and obtained the Royal Assent on 29th November 1917.

A most unfortunate *contretemps* marred the peace of the Administration in connection with the setting-up of this new Ministry. At this time, Lord Northcliffe had just returned from his Mission to America, and I was anxious to make the best use of his great driving power in the national interest. It seemed to me that there would be remarkable scope for this in the new Air Ministry, where the two existing wings of our flying services had to be welded together, and the new air weapon—a weapon of vast and undeveloped possibilities—employed to the fullest extent along lines still to be planned. Lord Cowdray, the Chairman of the Air Board, had done very sound and successful work in that post, and was quite naturally expecting to pass on to be Minister for Air in the new regime. But Lord Cowdray's health was not such as to permit him to give the necessary ruthless drive, the untiring leadership and energy which would have been essential to the new Ministry in the urgent circumstances of the moment. It was my intention to choose a younger and physically fitter man for the post of Air Minister. At a luncheon in Downing Street, in the course of conversation with Lord Northcliffe, I sounded him on the subject without making any definite offer. Before doing so I had intended to offer Lord Cowdray another and equally honourable position in the Ministry in which his great business experience and ripe judgment would have been valuable, but which would not put upon him such an exceptional nervous and physical strain. For the moment I did not discuss the matter with Lord Cowdray. The Air Ministry Bill was not yet through and in any event I did not propose to disturb Lord Cowdray unless Northcliffe was prepared to take the post. Northcliffe said he would let me know his answer when he had thought over the matter. In lamentable breach of my confidence, and with one of those lapses into blundering brutality to which his passion for the startling gesture sometimes led him, he proceeded to write me a letter declining the post, and embarking on a series of quite irrelevant criticisms of the Government in respect of the Censorship, our moderation in dealing with conscientious objectors, our inferiority to the Americans in fervour and enthusiasm, and such matters; and published this letter in full in the *Times* before I ever received it.

The text of this letter was as follows.

“15th November, 1917.

Dear Prime Minister,

I have given anxious consideration to your repeated invitation that I should take charge of the new Air Ministry. The reasons which have impelled me to decline that great honour and responsibility are in no way concerned with the office which is rightly to be set up. They are roughly as follows:—

Returning after five months spent in the virile atmosphere of the United States and Canada, I find that, while those two countries are proceeding with their war preparations with a fervour and enthusiasm little understood on this side of the Atlantic; while the United States has instantly put into operation Conscription, over which we wobbled for two years, and is making short work with sedition-mongers; while Canada has already given such proofs of thoroughness as the disfranchisement of conscientious objectors and the denaturalisation of all enemy aliens who have been naturalised in the last fifteen years; while we, for our part, are asking immense sacrifices from those peoples—there are still in office here those who dally with such urgent questions as that of the unity of war control, the eradication of sedition, the mobilisation of the whole man and woman power of the country, and the introduction of compulsory food rations. I have had personal experience myself, while in America, of the obstruction and delay in certain Departments in London, which, for example, postponed the sending of Lord Reading's vital and most successful Mission. I find that the Censorship is still being misused, and that men in various positions of authority, who should have been punished, have been retained and in some cases elevated. The spirit of the men and women of Great Britain is clearly as eager and as splendid as ever. We have, in my belief, the most efficient army in the world, led by one of the greatest generals, and I am well aware of the fine achievements of many others of our soldiers, sailors and statesmen; but I feel that in present circumstances I can do better work if I maintain my independence and am not gagged by a loyalty that I do not feel towards the whole of your Administration.

I take this opportunity of thanking you and the War Cabinet for the handsome message of praise sent to me as representing the five hundred officials of the British War Mission in the United States, many of them volunteer exiles. Their achievements and those of their ten thousand assistants deserve to be better known by their countrymen. The fact that their work is not known is due to the absurd secrecy about the War which is still prevalent. Everything that these officials are doing is known to our American friends, and of course to the Germans. I trust I make no breach of confidence in

saying that some of the documents which have passed through my hands as Head of the Mission are such as if published would greatly increase our prestige in the United States and hearten our people at home.

May I also take this opportunity of giving a warning about our relations with that great people from whom I have come? We have had the tragedy of Russia, due partly to lack of Allied propaganda to counteract that of the Germans. We have had the tragedy of Italy largely due to that same enemy propaganda. We have had the tragedies of Serbia, Roumania and Montenegro. There is one tragedy which I am sure we shall not have, and that is the tragedy of the United States. But, from countless conversations with leading Americans, I know that, unless there is swift improvement in our methods here, the United States will rightly take into its own hands the entire management of a great part of the War. It will not sacrifice its blood and treasure to incompetent handling of affairs in Europe.

In saying all this, which is very much on my mind, believe me that I have none but the most friendly feelings towards yourself, and that I am greatly honoured by your suggestion.

Yours sincerely,

NORTHCLIFFE."

The publication of this letter in such a manner, or at all, was characteristic of Lord Northcliffe's worst side. It was what made it so difficult to have confidential dealings with him. Where either his vanity or temper was implicated he had no regard for the decent behaviour which bound average men of honour. There was of course nothing unusual in the procedure by which he had been sounded as to his willingness to take the Air Ministry. Such soundings always have to be made before any reshuffling of offices in a Government takes place, and obviously it is taken for granted that persons so approached shall treat the matter in strictest confidence pending the completion of the other arrangements involved in the shuffle. Unless and until Northcliffe let me know that he would undertake the Air Ministry, I clearly could not approach Lord Cowdray, with a proposal that he should transfer to another ministerial post.

Thus the publication by Lord Northcliffe of the statement that I had offered him the Air Ministry placed Lord Cowdray in a very humiliating position. Not unnaturally, he took bitter offence at learning for the first time through the columns of the public Press, and not from me, that such a change of ministers was being contemplated. He promptly sent me his resignation from the chairmanship of the Air Board, in a letter of strong protest. He never forgave me the affront. The ranks of the Anti-Lloyd George Liberals received



an influential recruit, and in post-War years the section of the Press which he controlled became a vehicle of his implacable resentment and hostility which helped to widen and deepen that schism in the Liberal Party that has led to its crumbling and collapse.

The result was that while Parliament was duly carrying the Air Force Bill, we had lost our Air Minister. However, before the end of November I succeeded in persuading Lord Rothermere to accept this post. He held it for the very difficult first five months of the new Department, during which time he succeeded in carrying through the task of blending the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps into a single new service—the Royal Air Force. On 1st April, 1918, their fusion was formally accomplished. Lord Rothermere was working under grave handicaps, for the War had inflicted upon him two tragic bereavements, under which his health eventually gave way. Certain changes which he found it desirable to make in the Air Staff in April, 1918, provoked a fresh outburst of the criticism from which the new Ministry constantly suffered, and on 23rd April, 1918, he resigned his office. The last straw had been when he found that Members of Parliament who had been enrolled in his Headquarters Staff were using the information they thus acquired to lead attacks upon him in the House of Commons. In his letter of resignation, dated 23rd April, 1918, Lord Rothermere urged this as a final reason for his resignation:—

“Another and more decisive reason,” he wrote, “is that this young force after all the publicity it has received during the last few weeks requires a rest from comment and criticism. So far no harm has been done. I feel, however, that continuance during the next few months might impair discipline and prejudice efficiency.

With myself as Secretary of State there is every reason to suppose that comment and criticism will continue. . . . The danger to discipline through constant publicity is well illustrated in the report in this morning's newspaper of yesterday's proceedings in the House of Commons. Two of the three Members of Parliament pressing Mr. Bonar Law to give an early day for a debate on Air Ministry affairs are officers of the Royal Air Force holding junior Staff appointments under me in the Hotel Cecil. . . . Why in the House of Commons should they flout disciplinary codes where elsewhere similar conduct by any other Staff Officer would form the subject of enquiry by his superior officers?

Sequestered in the Hotel Cecil, Major Sir John Simon has acted as an assistant secretary or clerk to Major-General Sir H. Trenchard, late Chief of the Air Staff. Two months ago I mentioned to you the extreme unsuitability of this arrangement with its possible dangers. As events have proved, I was not wrong. . . .”

My reply, which was sent after it had been shown to and approved by my colleagues in the War Cabinet, was as follows:—

“10, Downing Street,  
Whitehall, S.W.1.  
25th April, 1918.

My dear Rothermere,

I have received your letter tendering your resignation as Secretary of State for the Air Force with the deepest regret. Your work there has been of inestimable service to the nation, and time will bring with it a full recognition of your achievement. It is no small thing to have taken over the conduct of an entirely new arm of the Service in the middle of a great war, to have extricated it from the difficulties which surrounded it, co-ordinated the two services which made it up, and bestowed on its administration an initiative which has given the new force a real supremacy at the front. And all this has been done in such a brief period of time.

It is the more to be lamented that, having set the Ministry on its legs, you cannot remain to enjoy the fruition of your own brilliant work. But I feel on reading your letter that I cannot press you to stay, much as the Government must suffer from your retirement.

Your sacrifices to the National cause have been so heavy, and the strain imposed on you so cruel that it would be impossible to deny you the right to some repose. Sympathy in these matters is generally best given by silence, but I am sure that you know without my telling you how much I sympathise with you in your losses and in the way in which you have continued your public duties in spite of everything.

No minister ever had greater difficulties to contend with than you had in effecting the fusion of the two Services and the Air Force has every right to be proud of its First Secretary of State.

I am authorised by my colleagues to state that they share fully the views I have expressed in this letter.

Yours very faithfully,  
D. LLOYD GEORGE.”

Testimony to the success which had been achieved in reorganising our air arm is supplied by Sir Douglas Haig's dispatch (dated 20th July, 1918) describing the German offensives of March and April, 1918. He says:—

“Throughout the period of active operations our airmen have established and maintained a superiority over the enemy's air forces without parallel since the days of the first Somme battle. Not content with destroying the enemy in the air, they have vigorously attacked his infantry, guns and transport with bombs and machine-gun fire, and in the fighting south of the Somme in particular gave

invaluable assistance to the infantry by these means on numerous occasions. In addition, the usual work of reconnaissance, photography, artillery co-operation and bombing has been carried out vigorously and with remarkable results."

Sir William Weir was appointed to the post vacated by Lord Rothermere, and held it until the end of the War. During these concluding months our Air Force further developed the marked superiority over the enemy which Lord Rothermere's administration had so conspicuously established.

During 1918, 30,000 aeroplanes were manufactured and 40,000 more were on order. Preparations were made for devastating aerial warfare against the chief cities of Germany by the spring of 1919. Happily the signing of the Armistice averted the necessity for carrying out this programme.

In recording the achievements of our Air Service, I may be allowed to quote the tribute I paid to it in the course of a speech in the House on 29th October, 1917, when I said:—

"I am sure the House would like special mention to be made of our Air Service. The heavens are their battlefield; they are the cavalry of the clouds. High above the squalor and the mud, so high in the firmament that they are not visible from earth, they fight out the eternal issues of right and wrong. Their daily, yea, their nightly struggles are like the Miltonic conflict between the winged hosts of light and darkness. They fight the foe high up, and they fight him low down. . . . Every flight is a romance, every record is an epic. They are the knighthood of this war, without fear and without reproach. They recall the old legends of chivalry, not merely by daring individually, but by the nobility of their spirit, and, among the multitudes of heroes let us think of the chivalry of the air."

Peace came, but the Ministry of Air has survived. It is a permanent contribution to our national organisation which we have inherited from the War. It is remarkable among Ministries in that it is concerned no less with the arts of peace than with those of war. On the military side it administers a third fighting service, which ranks alongside the country's forces on land and on water, and in days to come might well prove even more crucially important than they for national defence. But equally it controls on the civil side the development of aviation as a new servant of commerce and amenity, and its utility for this purpose will persist if war should finally and fortunately disappear from the future activities of mankind, and warships and cannon rust away.



## CHAPTER LVIII

### STOCKHOLM AND MR. ARTHUR HENDERSON

THE Russian Revolution provoked repercussions far and wide in the political ideas and movements of other countries. For that matter, it is still doing so, and in many lands it has proved and is proving the stimulus, by attraction or by repulsion, for revolutionary and counter-revolutionary upheavals which are bringing about great constitutional changes. When revolution fails to spread, it hardens into reaction.

The war conditions which made the unrest particularly dangerous, fomented by the Russian eruption, at the same time favoured the flow of its fiery streams. The social conditions and conventional restraints, inbred through generations of peace, had been unloosed. Men, torn from their homes, from their work, from all the training and habits of a lifetime, were being thrown together with strange companions from unfamiliar social orbits to be trained to destroy, or set to new tasks of munition manufacture or departmental duty. Women and girls were being emancipated at a stroke from the hobble skirts and chaperonage of the pre-War era, and sent forth, often in men's attire, to do work hitherto reserved for men only. The Government was perforce taking powers over men's lives, properties and businesses on an unprecedented scale. It was dictating as to wages, rates of profit, and the use to which industrial machinery and organisation were to be put. The break with the past seemed final, and every political theorist was stimulated to speculate what shape the new order could or should assume. So when Russia suddenly flung away her ancient Czarist regime, and embarked on a great Socialist experiment, numbers in this country were eager to emulate her example. That the movement of liberation which Russia was then beginning with such hopes and amid such an atmosphere of good wishes would rush headlong into the Red Terror, and complete the upheaval and uprooting of the existing social and economic order, was not then foreseen.

As the year 1917 advanced, therefore, we were faced, in addition to our darkening war anxieties, with the necessity of handling with a wise admixture of firmness and moderation the domestic situation that arose from industrial and political unrest, aggravated to an acute

degree by the forces released through the Russian upheaval. The shock that came from Petrograd passed through every workshop and mine, and produced a nervous disquiet which made things difficult in recruitment and munitionment. To maintain our national unity and pursue steadily our national purpose, it was vital that the members of the Government should keep their heads and handle the labour situation prudently as well as firmly. That was by no means easy. In this part of the struggle, Mr. Arthur Henderson became a war casualty.

Because so many differing and indeed violently opposed forces generally have a share in bringing about revolutions, the Russian, like all others, was a confused business. There were Army generals who wanted to make the Czar abdicate, and secure a regency under which they would be free from Court intrigues and interference. There were democratic leaders in the Duma who sought to establish responsible constitutional government. There were nihilists and anarchists whose chief purpose was utter revolt against the existing order, and international communists who desired to establish the Marxist state and the Third International. It could not be foreseen which of these various forces would finally triumph, and grasp the steering wheel of the revolution. The vast mass of the people in Russia just wanted to be released from their distress. They needed food and fuel. They were looking for efficient and clean Government. Most of all, they were tired of bloodshed and wanted peace. They were not concerned as to the group from which deliverance came as long as they got it. Which of the rival factions won depended on the qualities of leadership and organisation they could respectively produce.

On 15th March, 1917. our Ambassador at Petrograd, Sir George Buchanan, sent us a telegram which reflected the uncertainties of the situation:—

“Open opposition is likely to develop very shortly between parties of the Social Revolution and of the Duma. The latter is for war, and should it prevail quickly, Russia will be rendered stronger than in the past. Peace at any price is the object of the former party, and military disaster would follow its advent to power. Could English Labour leaders be induced to send a telegram to Duma Labour leaders (Kerensky and Chkhaidze) expressing their confidence that Kerensky and Chkhaidze and their comrades will support free peoples fighting German despotism, pointing out that every idle day spells disaster to their brothers, fighting in the trenches, and that victory to Germany would bring disaster to all classes of the Allies. The telegram might also refer to the unity of all classes in Britain, and especially to what the working classes are doing. Inasmuch as advice from

England at present moment carries great weight, I attach great importance to immediate dispatch of telegram on above lines."

A telegram was accordingly drafted by Mr. Henderson, the representative of Labour in the British War Cabinet, and sent off to the Labour leaders in the Duma:—

"Organised labour in Great Britain is watching with deepest sympathy the efforts of the Russian people to deliver themselves from power of reactionary elements which are impeding their advance to victory. Labour in England and France has long realised that despotism of Germany must be overthrown if way is to be opened for free and peaceful development of European nations. This conviction has inspired them to make unprecedented efforts and sacrifices, and we confidently look forward to assistance of Russian labour in achieving the object to which we have devoted ourselves. Earnestly trust you will impress on your followers that any remission of effort means disaster to comrades in trenches and to our common hopes of social regeneration."

A few days after this, on 26th March, Mr. Henderson reported to the War Cabinet that representatives of the French Socialist Party—who stood for war *à outrance*—were, with the authority and consent of the French Committee of Foreign Affairs, shortly arriving in England *en route* to Petrograd, whither they were going on a Mission to the Russian Socialist Party, their object being to persuade that party to do all in its power to bring the War to a satisfactory conclusion. The War Cabinet decided that Mr. Henderson should use his influence to secure that a suitably composed British Labour Deputation should accompany the French party with the same object. This was done, and Will Thorne and James O'Grady joined the Mission.

Their prospects of success in Russia were not improved by the action of some of their colleagues at home. British Socialism was then divided in opinion, the majority supporting the War, while the pacifist minority, strongly represented in the Independent Labour Party, whose leading figure was Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, devoted itself to criticising and creating difficulties and generally weakening the morale of the nation. When the delegates of the Labour Party were in Russia, a member of the I.L.P. sent a message to a Russian Socialist asserting that they were the paid emissaries of the British Government, and not real representatives of British Labour. This gave rise to violent attacks on them in the Russian Socialist Press—a dangerous effect in a country where discipline had vanished and murder by a suddenly excited mob was a commonplace occurrence. As Sir George Buchanan records in his book, "My Mission to Russia": "The matter was eventually put right by Mr. Hyndman,



who requested Kerensky by telegraph to 'contradict most emphatically lying statement of the I.L.P.' "

Meantime, discussion was on foot as to the holding of an international Socialist Conference at Stockholm. This suggestion had arisen as follows: the international confederation of the Socialist organisations in various countries—known as the Second International—which existed before the War and had its headquarters at Brussels, had been temporarily scattered by the German invasion of Belgium. Its offices were abandoned, and its chief officials escaped to The Hague. But efforts were made to revive it by the Dutch and Scandinavian Socialists, and in April, 1917, a joint Dutch-Scandinavian Committee, presided over by the Swedish Socialist statesman, Mr. Branting, issued an invitation to all the Socialist parties of the world to attend an international Socialist Conference at Stockholm to discuss ways and means of bringing about peace.

The proposal was not one likely to find wide acceptance. Belligerent governments would clearly refuse to have terms of peace dictated to them by a Party Conference. The same observation would apply if the international conference had been Liberal or Conservative. Most of the Socialists in the belligerent countries supported their governments in carrying on the War. The Executive of the French Socialist Party decided at the end of April by 13 votes to 11 not to go to Stockholm, while the Russian extremists led by Lenin reached a similar decision for opposite motives, being contemptuous of the bourgeois mentality of the Second International. On 11th May, Mr. Henderson reported to the War Cabinet that the Executive of the British Labour Party had decided not to take part in the Stockholm Conference.

The proposal therefore seemed dead. But it was known that in Russia there was considerable division of opinion among the Socialists about the issue of continuing the War or trying to make a separate peace, and Mr. Henderson told us that the British Labour Party Executive proposed to send a Mission to Petrograd, consisting of himself, Mr. G. Roberts, M.P., and Mr. Purdy, to strengthen the war purpose of the Russian Socialists. We decided that in view of industrial conditions here it would be better for Mr. Henderson not to go, but we were willing for Mr. Roberts to be given permission to join such a deputation. At that time Russia was being administered by a Provisional Government based on the Duma. But much of the real power was in the hands of the Petrograd Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates—the Soviet. This body decided to invite representatives of both the majority and the minority Socialist movements in the Allied countries to come and discuss the situation with it. News of this reached us in a telegram sent on 10th May, by M. Miliukoff, the Russian Foreign Minister, through the Russian Embassy in London:—

"The Executive Committee of the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies have asked me to forward to the Governments of Great Britain, France and Italy the following telegram:—

'The Executive Committee express the hope that the Governments of Great Britain, France and Italy will not refuse to grant facilities for the journey to Russia to the delegations of the Italian Social Democratic Party, the British Independent Labour and Social Democratic Parties, and of the Opposition Group of the French Socialist Labour Party who have been invited to Petrograd. The Executive Committee would be grateful for a favourable reply.'

Please convey this message to His Majesty's Government."

We decided before answering this message to send a telegram to the French and Italian Governments in the following terms:—

"His Majesty's Government have received through the Russian Embassy here a formal invitation from the Executive Committee of the Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies to grant facilities for the journey to Russia of representatives of the Independent Labour and Social Democratic Parties. These Parties form a small fraction of the Socialist movement in Great Britain, and their opinions are of a pacifist complexion. His Majesty's Government understand that a similar invitation has been issued to the French/Italian Government. To reply by a direct refusal would irritate the Russian extremists and perhaps discourage their moderate colleagues. On the other hand, in view of the resignation of M. Gutchkoff, and the reports of the growing disorders in Russia, it seems impossible to accept the invitation without reserve. His Majesty's Government therefore propose to reply stating that, owing to submarine warfare, the means of communication between Western Europe and Russia are very much restricted, and only those persons can be allowed to travel in that direction who wish to do so for business of National importance. No intimation has yet reached His Majesty's Government from any section of the Socialist Party expressing their desire to go to Russia. But it is impossible for His Majesty's Government to give a definite reply on the subject until they know what persons wish to go to Russia and what is the object of the proposed journey.

His Majesty's Government would be glad to know if the French/Italian Government concur in the action proposed."

On the following day, 16th May, 1917, Mr. Henderson told us that the British Labour Party was not proposing to send any delegates in reply to the Soviet's invitation until further information had been

received from the Russian Socialist Party as to the nature of their proposals.

The Dutch-Scandinavian Socialists had not entirely abandoned their idea of a conference at Stockholm. They had proceeded to arrange a series of separate and successive conversations between themselves and representatives of the various belligerent nations' Socialist Parties. M. Vandervelde, the Belgian Socialist leader, took part in one such conversation at Stockholm in early May, and we learned that the arrival there of German and Russian delegations was expected shortly. The British Labour Party had put out the suggestion of an Inter-Allied Socialist Conference in London; but the Russians had not yet consented, as they were now in favour of holding an International Conference in some neutral country. In these circumstances, the Foreign Office arranged that the Labour delegates who had been visiting Russia, should stop at Bergen on their way back, so as to be available if it were decided to send British representatives to any of the conversations that might take place at Stockholm.

The matter was discussed at a meeting of the War Cabinet on 21st May, 1917. In view of the prospect of German Socialists going to Stockholm and fraternising there with the Russians, it was suggested that there might be an advantage in sending a strong British delegation, even one headed by Mr. Arthur Henderson. Alternatively, it might be worth while to send Mr. Henderson to Petrograd on a special Mission, similar to that being carried out for the French by M. Albert Thomas. We were told that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and Mr. Jowett of the Independent Labour Party, and Mr. Inkpen of the British Socialist Party, had now applied for passports to Petrograd, and presumably had the intention of stopping at Stockholm *en route*. This was a development arising from the invitation extended by the Russian Soviet to the Minority Socialist movements.

It was not at this stage clear whether the various conversations proceeding at Stockholm were likely to be followed by a formal conference. If so, it was agreed that while there was a good case for having British representatives there to watch proceedings and put the British case, it would be very difficult for Mr. Henderson, as a member of the War Cabinet, to attend. If Mr. MacDonald and his pacifist friends were going, we felt that a strong delegation of the British Labour Party ought to go as well.

We decided to cable M. Albert Thomas at Petrograd that we thought it dangerous for Russian and German Socialists to confer without any British representatives being present, and ask for his views on the matter.

Two days afterwards, on 23rd May, we further considered the question of our representation in Russia. Our Ambassador there, Sir George Buchanan, had rendered very fine service, but the very fact



that he had established excellent relations with the Imperial Government, and with the Provisional Government which replaced it, made him an object of suspicion and distrust to the new Administration which had now been set up under Kerensky, with the support of the Soviet. It was urged by the Foreign Office that he should be supplemented or replaced by someone whose known sympathies with Labour and Socialist movements would ensure him the confidence of the Russian Government.

The War Cabinet was also impressed with the success achieved in Petrograd by M. Albert Thomas, the French Socialist leader, whose services had been publicly recognised in an interview granted by M. Terestchenko, the new Russian Foreign Minister. As the continued co-operation of Russia was clearly of great importance to us in the War, we decided to invite Mr. Arthur Henderson to make a personal sacrifice and to go to Petrograd on a similar footing to that of M. Albert Thomas.

No immediate decision was considered necessary as to how long Mr. Henderson should stay, but he was advised to make his political arrangements on the assumption that the visit would be temporary. It was decided that, in the event of Mr. Henderson's accepting the invitation, Sir George Buchanan should be retained in Petrograd for a short time in order to post Mr. Henderson up on matters of detail. At the end of a few weeks, subject, however to Mr. Henderson's concurrence at the time, Sir George Buchanan should be recalled to London for purposes of consultation. It was generally agreed that it would be desirable for Mr. Henderson to leave for Petrograd at the earliest possible date.

Mr. Henderson read a telegram he had received from M. Thomas to the effect that the Workmen's Council was awaiting the arrival of a British Delegation, and that he attached great importance to the presence of Mr. Henderson himself.

There were clearly a number of very strong reasons for sending Mr. Henderson on this Mission, and even for arranging that he should for a short time replace Sir George Buchanan at the Embassy in Petrograd. Things in Russia were in a state of great confusion and uncertainty, and in the medley of competing forces between which its Government was divided, it was very important to reinforce those elements that were favourably disposed to continuing the War. It was becoming more and more doubtful whether Russia would carry through with the Allies right to the end. The demand for peace was becoming more and more imperative. The speeches delivered at the endless meetings held at street corners in Russian cities were a prolonged keen for peace. Albert Thomas described them to me on his return. His account reminded me of the meetings I had witnessed in the Welsh Revival. The excitement was not violent, but deep. An eerie emotion, more religious than political, seemed to have

possessed the Russian workers. With a nation in such a mood, anything was possible. But its temper did not conduce to an effective prosecution of the War. The best we could hope for was that the Russian Armies would defend their trenches, and thus hold in front of them a million or two Germans and Austrians until the Americans were ready to fight. In this task M. Albert Thomas, a Socialist speaking to fellow Socialists, had achieved marked success. It was not a part that Sir George Buchanan was fitted to play, for he never concealed the fact that he had no sympathy whatever with Socialists. In his book he tells how M. Albert Thomas had dinner with him one day at Petrograd, along with Henderson, and two Russian leaders—one of them also a Socialist leader—and how: "talking to me after dinner, he asked: 'What would you have said had you been told five years ago that I and two other Socialists would one day be guests at your table?' 'The very idea of such a thing would,' I replied, 'have appalled me.'" The Russians could not but be aware of this covert antagonism behind the suavity and polish of the expert diplomat, and its existence discounted for them the value of any advice he gave them. He belonged so essentially and obviously to the old order that was passing away—that had already passed away beyond recall in Russia.

Mr. Arthur Henderson duly went to Russia. But when he acquainted himself with the range and difficulty of the tasks which Sir George Buchanan was carrying out, he decided that he could not undertake to relieve him of them even temporarily. He was an experienced political organiser, in fact he proved himself to be the greatest political organiser of his day. But this job called for different qualities and he had the good sense to realise they were not his best. He spent six weeks there, and early in July decided to return home.

Meantime there were further developments in regard to Stockholm. Following the Soviet's invitations to the Minority Socialist Parties, we had decided to grant passports to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and his party to proceed to Russia, with the prospect of their calling in at Stockholm to take part in the conversations that were being held there. But we learnt a little later that the French Government had refused similar permission to its Socialists, and that the Government of the United States was perturbed at our decision to allow representatives of our pacifist element to proceed to Stockholm. It was urged that these conferences might have an injurious effect on the morale of the soldiers—this was said to be General Pétain's view—and might force the Allies into a premature and unsatisfactory peace.

There was also a growth of feeling against our decision in this country, owing to anger at the action of seditious elements. This hostility was fostered by the Labour, Socialistic and Democratic Conference held in Leeds on 3rd June, with the object of establishing in Great Britain a Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates, on

the lines of the one now in existence in Russia. The immediate effect of the speeches delivered and the resolutions passed at this meeting was to rouse strong indignation against the revolutionary and pacifist agitators who were stirring up trouble in many important munition centres throughout the country. Whether the promoters of the gathering contemplated revolution or not, depended I think in their minds on the response given to their appeals and the measure of support accorded to their policy. Had the workmen rallied to their proposal of establishing a Soviet in Britain on Russian lines, then the Leeds meeting would have inaugurated a British Revolution and Mr. MacDonald would have been our Kerensky. That is why public opinion took alarm. There were in particular, strong protests from the Sailors' and Firemen's Union and from the British Workers' League against allowing Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and his fellows to go to Russia or to Stockholm.

On the whole however we decided that it might give offence to the Russian Socialists if we withdrew the passports. The general body of opinion in this country was entirely sound, and we considered that if Mr. Ramsay MacDonald went to Stockholm and there adopted a German point of view, he would be absolutely discredited in this country. On the other hand, if he adopted the Allied point of view about Belgium and Alsace-Lorraine, the Germans would see that even extreme Socialistic opinion was against them. In either event we stood to gain. We wired to Mr. Henderson in Russia for his views, which were favourable to allowing Mr. MacDonald to proceed to Russia. At the same time, and especially in view of the French and Russian attitude, we felt we could not grant him permission to take part in a conference at Stockholm with enemy subjects. Our attitude was explained to the House of Commons by Lord Robert Cecil on 8th June, 1917, when in reply to a question he said:—

“The War Cabinet, after very careful consideration, decided that it was desirable to issue these passports if applied for, because the Russian Government had strongly and repeatedly expressed the desire that the representatives of the minority as well as of the majority of working-class opinion should be allowed to visit Petrograd, and have expressly mentioned the Independent Labour Party as one of the bodies which they desire to have that opportunity.

The War Cabinet were advised by those most qualified to express an opinion, including our Ambassador, Sir George Buchanan and Mr. Henderson, that a refusal would lead to very serious misconception among our Russian Allies, and would cause great discouragement to those in Russia who were most anxious to carry on the struggle for freedom with the fullest energy. If the passports are issued, they will be for Petrograd.



They are not intended to enable the holders to attend or take part in any international Conference at Stockholm, and still less to communicate directly or indirectly with enemy subjects at Stockholm or elsewhere, and it is only on this express understanding that the passports will be issued. I understand that representatives of the views of the great majority of the working class may also apply for passports to go to Petrograd, and these also will be issued if asked for."

Mr. Ramsay MacDonald thereupon asked if he would be allowed to talk with such men as Mr. Branting, and Lord Robert Cecil said that Mr. Branting was a highly respected statesman in Sweden, and by no means hostile to the Allied cause; but that the prohibition would apply to communication, direct or indirect, with the enemy.

Further responsibility was however taken out of our hands by the action of the Sailors' and Firemen's Union, which decided to refuse to convey Messrs. Ramsay MacDonald and Jowett to Russia.

One Sunday afternoon Mr. Ramsay MacDonald rang me up from Aberdeen. The telephone for long distances is still a school of patience; it was then an instrument of torture. Conversation was faint, disjointed, disrupted and incoherent. I did ultimately gather that Mr. MacDonald was experiencing difficulty in getting on board the ship that was to carry him to Russia, and that the sailors were giving him some taste of what a general strike, such as he subsequently advocated in 1926, would be like. I promised to see what could be done. I asked Mr. Barnes to interview Mr. Havelock Wilson for us, and try to persuade him to use his influence with the Sailors' and Firemen's Union with a view to inducing them not to persist in their embargo on Mr. MacDonald's visit to Russia. Havelock Wilson was obdurate. I knew that his influence with the sailors was paramount.

At the beginning of July, Mr. Snowden wrote to me pleading with the Government to take some action to facilitate the journey of Messrs. MacDonald and Jowett, and again Mr. Barnes undertook to use his good offices on their behalf. But on 17th July he had to report to us that in his opinion the matter should be dropped. The Sailors' and Firemen's Union had proved adamant. There would be grave difficulties in prosecuting them for their attitude. To attempt compulsion would have been worse than futile, for the feeling throughout the country was one of unqualified approval of the action of the sailors. It was suggested that we might have sent a cruiser. Had we done so it might have led to a serious mutiny. We had plenty of troubles without provoking fresh ones. The Labour Unions of the country expressed no resentment at Mr. MacDonald's failure to secure transport for Russia. He was barred by his own comrades in

the Labour movement from carrying out his purpose of visiting Russia, despite the readiness of the Government to let him go there and our utmost efforts of persuasion on his behalf.

Mr. Henderson arrived back from Russia on 24th June. I was not in England when he returned, as I had gone to Paris on the 23rd for an Inter-Allied Conference, accompanied by Mr. Balfour, General Smuts, Admiral Jellicoe and Sir William Robertson. I cannot help regretting that I was not on the spot when Mr. Henderson reached England, as had I been able to talk things over with him immediately, I might have been able to avert the very unfortunate conflict which arose between him and his colleagues in the War Cabinet.

Mr. Henderson brought back with him four members of the Russian Soviet, who had been appointed to visit the Socialist Parties of the Allied countries. Without first meeting his colleagues of the War Cabinet, and ascertaining the attitude that was being adopted to current problems, he proceeded to attend a meeting of the Executive of the Labour Party, of which he was still Secretary. They had before them an invitation from the French Socialists to send some representatives to accompany the Russian Soviet delegates, to Paris, to discuss with them the proposals for an Inter-Allied Socialist Conference and for an International Socialist Conference at Stockholm. This latter proposal had been revived by Mr. Branting and the Dutch-Scandinavian Socialist Committee, at the instigation of the left-wing Socialists of Russia. When Mr. Henderson was in Russia, Kerensky had told him he fully supported the plan. This is understandable in view of Kerensky's position at the time. Though not at the head of the Government, he was a leading member of it, and he also was a member of the Soviet, thus keeping a foot in each camp. This bifurcation, which at the time gave him his power, was also ultimately the cause of his downfall and of the collapse of Russia into Bolshevism; for Kerensky could never bring himself to take sufficiently rigorous measures against the extreme left, even when they resorted to violent measures to achieve their objects. He was a master of the eloquence that stirs masses, but he trusted too much to his remarkable gifts in that direction, and ignored the fact that there comes a time when words must be translated into action. Able to sway the Duma, the Soviet or the crowd triumphantly with a speech, he relied on his oratorical arts. The man who mattered—Lenin—was not within the sound of his voice, and had he been it would have made no difference to that ruthless fanatic. He despised the Kerensky type.

Lenin was also a great speaker. Orators are divided into two classes. There is the orator for whom effective speech is in itself the aim and also the end. The emotion he rouses is the measure and attainment of his success. But there is the other type for whom oratory means persuading and stirring his hearers to definite action

in which the orator leads. The fact that Kerensky hovered and hesitated between these two types, but that Lenin belonged to the latter class, made the Bolshevik Revolution.

Fresh from the glow of that atmosphere of emotionalism and exaltation which great Revolutions excite, Mr. Henderson was out of tune with the stern but frigid sense of responsibility and self-control which was dominant here. When he came back from Russia the fine steel of his character was magnetised by his experiences. He was in an abnormal frame of mind. He had more than a touch of the revolutionary malaria. His temperature was high and his mood refractory. The Executive of the British Labour Party offered to nominate him, as its Secretary, to go along with its Chairman, Mr. Wardle, and its Treasurer, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, as their delegates to Paris with the Russian Soviet emissaries. He accepted the nomination. It was a profound blunder. As a Member of the British War Cabinet he had no right to go off to Paris without even consulting his colleagues in the Cabinet, arm in arm with Ramsay MacDonald, who was openly opposed to the War, and to all measures for its effective prosecution, and had been organising pacifist propaganda, to talk over with French Socialists the arrangements for an International Conference of which his own Government did not approve, and to which our Allies the French, the Italians and the Americans were strongly opposed.

Mr. Henderson failed to put in an appearance at the meetings of the War Cabinet on the 25th and 26th July. At the latter meeting the question was raised of his proposed visit to Paris, which had come to the knowledge of the Foreign Office through the application of the Labour Party delegates for passports. Mr. Henderson had not notified the War Cabinet of his intentions, though he cabled me in Paris where I was at the time, stating that he was coming to Paris with four Russian delegates and Messrs. Wardle and MacDonald—not, however, stating their business.

The War Cabinet was naturally a good deal perturbed at the news of Mr. Henderson's intended trip, and decided that Mr. Henderson should be asked to confer with his colleagues in the War Cabinet at 7.30 p.m. that evening, with a view to their ascertaining from him how far the proposed action committed His Majesty's Government to the meeting of British Socialist representatives with enemy Socialist representatives at Stockholm; and whether the inclusion of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald among those chosen to proceed to Paris implied official recognition by the British Government of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's status as a representative of British Socialists.

This conference with Mr. Henderson was duly held, and the Members of the War Cabinet told him clearly how thoroughly they disapproved of the course he had decided to take. He intimated to them that he had made up his mind and his arrangements for the



visit, and could not and would not draw back. Mr. Bonar Law and his Cabinet colleagues were in a difficult position, for they could hardly prohibit Mr. Henderson from going, nor yet demand his resignation from the War Cabinet as a condition of his action; and yet it was clear that they would be blamed by Parliament and the country for allowing the Cabinet to be mixed up, through one of its members, in a discussion between Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and French and Russian Socialists, about arrangements for a World Socialist Conference where Germans would discuss with British pacifists how to end the War and on what terms to arrange peace. Mr. Henderson was in an aggressive mood, and informed them that it was on his advice that the Executive of the Labour Party had now decided in favour of sending delegates to Stockholm. This met with unanimous disapproval from the Cabinet, and Mr. Henderson told them that if they insisted he was willing to tender his resignation from the War Cabinet. Naturally they could not press him to do this, for they knew that I greatly valued his membership, and appreciated the help he had rendered the Government in our relations with Labour. So amid this atmosphere of disapproval he went off to Paris.

His behaviour at Paris was hardly of a nature to reassure public opinion here. Along with Mr. Ramsay MacDonald he became a member of a small sub-committee to examine and revise the proposed arrangements for the Stockholm Conference. The other members were a left-wing and a right-wing French Socialist, and two of the delegates from the Russian Soviet—Messrs. Ehrlich and Goldenberg, from the right and left wing respectively of Russian Socialism. On this committee Mr. Henderson tried hard to secure agreement that the Stockholm Conference should not go further than mutual consultation as to the war aims of the respective belligerent countries, and the lines on which they might be willing to make peace, and that it should not proceed further to pass binding resolutions on these matters, where neutrals and the enemy might outvote British Socialists upon issues vital for this country. He had some success in this effort, but the fact that then and subsequently this question seems to have been unresolved, and that there was a strong wish on the part of a number of the national Socialist groups proposing to attend Stockholm to make it the occasion for authoritative pronouncements, shows how recklessly Mr. Henderson was plunging in supporting the scheme.

He returned to England on 1st August, and had an interview with me at which he recounted his proceedings. I could not disguise the unpleasant character of the situation which he had created by his action. At the same time I was extremely unwilling to lose him from the Government. He had been a loyal and courageous colleague. He had done some very fine work for the country as member of my

own Cabinet and of the preceding one, in helping us to keep in touch with Labour and in getting the Trade Unions to co-operate with us in necessary war measures. I also had a warm personal esteem for him. So I decided to talk the whole thing over with the rest of the War Cabinet and seek their agreement with the course of retaining him with us if at all practicable. I asked him to come round to the Cabinet that afternoon at half-past four, to discuss matters with us.

It was of course inevitable that the other members of the War Cabinet would wish to express their views in this discussion with considerable frankness, and we decided to get this part over before asking Mr. Henderson to join us. As a result, he was asked on his arrival to wait a while in my Secretary's room. This was the famous "doormat" incident. Unfortunately the delay, which was designed solely to spare him personal unpleasantness, lasted about an hour, and when at the end of that time Mr. Barnes went out to speak to him about what had been taking place, he found Mr. Henderson in a highly resentful frame of mind. There was no longer any question of his offering to resign, as he had done at the Cabinet meeting before he left for Paris. On the contrary, he challenged us to demand his resignation—which, as I have said, was the last thing I wished to do. He recounted the circumstances of his decision to visit Paris, and urged that his course there had been on wise lines, particularly in regard to making the Stockholm Conference a consultation and not an Assembly at which binding decisions should be taken. As to whether he himself would propose to go to Stockholm if invited by the British Labour Party, he declined to give a definite answer. "He had always realised that it would be very difficult for him to proceed to Stockholm as a Member of the British War Cabinet. Consequently, if he should receive a nomination for the Conference, he would have to reconsider the whole position according to circumstances."

We made it clear to him that we wanted to retain him in the Cabinet, and examined with him how the case could best be stated in Parliament, which wished to discuss the matter that evening on the adjournment. It was generally agreed that Mr. Henderson could dispose of criticism in the House of Commons by pointing out that the difficulty had arisen from the fact that he held a dual position as a Member of the War Cabinet and as Secretary of the Executive Committee of the British Labour Party. It might frankly be admitted that, on the present occasion, this had entailed some misunderstanding, but it must be borne in mind that it also possessed great advantages. It had enabled Mr. Henderson in the past to keep in the closest possible touch with the views of the Labour Party, and so, by first-hand information, to assist the Government in preparing its war measures on lines which would be acceptable to Labour.

Moreover, it had enabled Mr. Henderson to attend the previous Conferences of Allied Socialists with good results. For example, only last Christmas he had attended a Socialist Conference at Paris, where he had met with considerable opposition, but had eventually induced the Conference to take the view which he shared with the British Government in regard to the prosecution of the War. Further, he could point out that members of the French and other Allied Governments occupied a position similar to his own. On balance, therefore, the dual nature of his position had been an advantage.

We recognised that the House of Commons was less concerned at the moment about Stockholm than with the fact that Mr. Henderson, a Member of the War Cabinet, had gone off to this Paris meeting in company with Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, who only a day or two earlier had been making himself conspicuous as the leader of the pacifists in a debate on war aims in the House of Commons, and who, in the Manifesto of Aims of the Leeds Conference which he had a leading part in summoning, had declared that its purpose was to make this country like Russia. But we suggested that Mr. Henderson could remind Parliament that this was not the first Conference to which he had gone in MacDonald's company. Their association on such occasions was inevitable, since one was Secretary and the other Treasurer of the British Labour Party. If he also reaffirmed his war attitude, on the lines of some of his recent speeches, he should satisfy the House.

Mr. Henderson had to face a rather unfriendly Chamber that evening, when on the motion for the adjournment he was called to give an account of his conduct to the House of Commons. In his defence he urged that one important part of his Paris visit had been to make arrangements for an Inter-Allied Socialist Conference; that, as to the Stockholm proposal, he had found, when in Russia, that the Russians were strongly in favour of it, so he had willingly accepted the invitation of the Labour Party to be a member of the delegation to Paris to make arrangements for it; that the anomaly of his doing so while a member of the War Cabinet was inherent in his dual position. He had accompanied Mr. Ramsay MacDonald to Paris and on to the sub-committee there because he wanted to keep him in order. "I deemed it of the highest importance that I should go on the sub-committee to assist in keeping my Hon. Friend the Member for Leicester right. . . . If there had to be a representative of the Minority, and if that representative was elected by the Executive of the Party, then I was not going to demur. I was going to accept the position, and do what I could, if I found him going astray. . . ." And apart from his duty of chaperoning Mr. MacDonald and keeping him out of mischief, Mr. Henderson urged that if there was going to be a Stockholm Conference, it was his duty to see that it was held at a date when the Americans could be present if they wished, and that



it was a consultative not a binding assembly. He suggested that there might be considerable advantages in the holding of such a Conference, but at the same time made it clear that his own views on our war aims and the need of fighting till we could win them were unaltered.

A little later in the debate I myself spoke warmly in Henderson's defence. I paid a tribute to his war services to the Government, and justified the anomaly of his dual status as Member of the War Cabinet and Secretary of the Labour Party on the ground of its proved practical utility. In France, M. Albert Thomas occupied an analogous position. I promised that the Government would give this problem its careful consideration, and would consult about it with France. The Government was not committed to Stockholm. The Inter-Allied Conference in London was a different matter, and we thought this very desirable. In conclusion, I begged the House not to take a line which might increase the troubles of the Russian Government, which was just then facing extraordinary difficulties.

My speech had the desired effect of moderating the temper of the House. The motion for adjournment was talked out and the difficult corner safely rounded. But the affair left Mr. Henderson in a stubborn and defiant temper which was before long to cause further trouble. A combination of pugnacity and sensitiveness is not easily appeased.

At this time the situation in Russia was causing us grave anxiety. For a good while past, its government had borne a most indefinite and unreliable character. While the official Executive was preaching a continuance of the War, it was allowing the utmost civil and military disorder. Bolshevik Commissars, representing the left wing of the Soviet, incited the troops to abandon the war and shoot their officers. They persuaded workmen to leave their tasks in munition factories. There was no certainty who was really governing Russia. At the beginning of August the whole government fell into chaos, and on 4th August, Sir George Buchanan told us in a cable "We are at present without a Government, so that there is no one to whom I can speak." A telegram of the same date from the Military Attaché at Petrograd informed us: —

"As things stand at present, this country is travelling straight to ruin. No real measures have been taken during the last fortnight to re-establish among the troops in the rear, either the authority of the officers or discipline among the ranks. Until discipline in the rear has been established and the troops are made to fight, there is not the slightest hope of an improvement in the conduct of the Army at the front. And while there is no discipline in the Army, the men in the railway repair shops and in the mines cannot be made to work.

If things are allowed to go on as at present, there will be a general breakdown of railway transport in the winter, and that will result in a famine in Petrograd and in the Army. The only man at present with any magnetic influence among the Ministers is Kerensky, and he does not yet understand the necessity of discipline. Among his immediate military advisers, none are men of character. The Socialists would prefer to run a class war rather than the national war, and to the mass of the soldiers this appeals as being not so dangerous. . . .”

A few days later, Kerensky formed a coalition government in which the Soviet was only one of the groups represented. Its influence was to some extent overpowered and held in check by the other groups.

At the meeting of the War Cabinet on 8th August we discussed once again the question of the Stockholm Conference. We had learnt both from the United States and the Italian Government that they were not going to allow representatives from their countries to go to Stockholm. We were also opposed to the Conference, as was France. The Attorney-General had circulated to the Cabinet on the previous day the information that it would be illegal for any British subject to engage in conference with enemy subjects except with the authority of the Crown. Mr. Henderson was at first inclined to urge that this decision should be forthwith published, but after consulting with his Labour colleagues he found that they were unanimously opposed to this being done before the Labour Party conference, which was to take place on the 10th August, and he informed me that he agreed with this decision. He suggested, however, that instead of the Government announcing its opposition to the Stockholm Conference, we should wait until after the Labour Party meeting, for if this turned down the proposal, nothing further would be necessary. This idea was discussed with him at our Cabinet meeting on the 8th, and it was felt that it would be much more convenient to the Russian Government, and more conducive to the maintenance of good relations between the British Government and the Labour Party, that the working men themselves should refuse to attend rather than that the Government should announce their decision and thereby appear to dictate to the Labour Party. This course, it had been ascertained by personal enquiry, was also acceptable to the French Government. From this point of view the best course appeared to be to leave the final decision until after the meeting of the Labour Party on Friday, 10th August.

We decided that in replying to any questions on the matter in the House of Commons, Mr. Bonar Law should confine himself to stating that:—

“(a) The attendance of British delegates at the Conference would be illegal.

- (b) Such a Conference could not be attended by British delegates without the permission of the Government.
- (c) The whole question was being examined by Government.
- (d) It was obviously one which concerned not this Government alone, and
- (e) A full statement would be made on Monday, the 13th August."

Mr. Henderson was present at this Cabinet meeting, and took part in the discussion which ended in the decisions which I have here set out. Apart from him and myself, there were also present the other members of the War Cabinet—Lord Curzon, Lord Milner, Mr. Bonar Law and General Smuts—and in addition, Mr. Balfour, Lord Robert Cecil, Lord Derby and Sir William Robertson. I am not speaking alone from my own recollection, but from that of all these eight responsible statesmen, when I say that the impression we all had was that Mr. Henderson at this discussion recognised the impossibility of pressing the Stockholm Conference, and agreed with us that it must be abandoned. Indeed, he assured us that he expected the Labour Conference would turn it down "by a fair majority."

Our surprise may therefore be judged when in the Press on Friday morning there appeared the statement that Mr. Henderson was still in favour of the sending of British delegates to Stockholm, and would urge that view in the Labour Conference to be held that day. We were of course aware that Mr. Henderson held to the idea that Stockholm was greatly desired by the Russians, particularly by Kerensky. But it so happened that the last few days had seen a considerable change in the Russian situation. The power of the Soviet for the time being had been greatly reduced, and Kerensky's need to conciliate it by supporting its desire for the Stockholm Conference was now far less urgent. This fact, and the circumstance that the Russian Government was no longer concerned about the holding of the Conference, were communicated in a letter from the Russian Embassy which we received on Thursday morning, and which was promptly circulated to members of the Cabinet. It was in Mr. Henderson's possession on Thursday evening, by his own subsequent admission, when he was preparing his speech for the Friday meeting of the Labour Party. The letter was critically important for the issue, and I give it in full:—

" Russian Embassy, London,  
8th August, 1917.

Your Excellency,

In a telegram I sent to the Russian Foreign Minister three or four days ago I gave him an account of the statements made in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister and Mr. Henderson



concerning the latter's visit to Paris, as well as of Mr. Bonar Law's statement regarding the Stockholm Conference and of the discussions which were taking place in the different Labour organisations of Great Britain as to the desirability of sending delegates to Stockholm. I also drew the Russian Foreign Minister's attention to the reply given by the American Federation of Labour to the French Confédération Générale du Travail.\* In conclusion I said the following: I consider it absolutely necessary, with a view to safeguarding the stability and closeness of our union with Great Britain, where the majority of public opinion is adverse to the Conference, that I should be in a position to declare most emphatically to Mr. Balfour that the Russian Government, as well as His Majesty's Government, regard this matter as a Party concern and not a matter of State, and that the decisions of the Conference, should it be convened, would in no way be binding on the future course of Russian policy and of Russia's relations with her Allies.'

In reply to this message I have just received the following telegram: 'I entirely approve of the declaration to be made to His Majesty's Government in the sense suggested by you and you are hereby authorised to inform the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs that, although the Russian Government do not deem it possible to prevent Russian delegates from taking part in the Stockholm Conference, they regard this Conference as a Party concern, and its decisions in no wise binding upon the liberty of action of the Government.'

I hasten to lay before you the above information, as I fear that the impression has hitherto prevailed that, in the words of one of the London newspapers, 'Russia ardently desired the Stockholm Conference,' and this argument has been put forward in order to influence British public opinion in favour of the Labour and Socialist Parties of Great Britain participating in the Conference.

I have, etc.,

C. NABOKOFF."

The importance of this statement was obvious, in view of the fact that the argument which weighed most strongly with Mr. Henderson, and on which he was going to lay most stress in the Friday Labour Conference, was the unpleasant effect on the Russian Government which our refusal to send delegates to Stockholm would entail. On the contrary, the Russian Government was now no longer under the heel of the extreme Socialists of the Soviet, by whom the renewed move for a Stockholm Conference had been fathered, and was striving to shake free from their domination still more. The holding of the

\* The American Federation had declined to send delegates to Stockholm.

Stockholm Conference at their instigation would not strengthen Kerensky's hands in his struggle with them.

Knowing this; knowing too, that the War Cabinet of which he was a member was definitely opposed to the Stockholm Conference, and that it would be illegal for British subjects to attend it, Mr. Henderson went to the Labour Conference on Friday morning and delivered a passionate oration in favour of British Socialists sending representatives there. News of this was brought to me, and I promptly sent him round a further copy of M. Nabokoff's letter with a request that he would communicate it to the Conference. He did not do so, holding apparently that he had sufficiently covered the ground in his speech when he stated that there had been a tremendous change in the position in Russia since he was there, and that "Such evidence as we have, though it is slight, suggests that there has been a modification in the Government's attitude towards the Conference."

On leaving the morning session of the Conference, he wrote me the following letter:—

" Offices of the War Cabinet,  
2, Whitehall Gardens,  
London, S.W.1.  
10th August, 1917.

My dear Prime Minister,

Mr. Sutherland forwarded me the telegram signed by Nabokoff on your instructions. I had already seen it and in the course of my speech, I took the opportunity of intimating that there had been a modification in the attitude of the new Government as compared with the old to the proposed Conference.

The Conference has adjourned till two o'clock with no debate, in order that the different sections can take counsel as to the course they are prepared to support when we resume this afternoon.

I think I ought to inform you that after the most careful consideration, I came to the conclusion that I could take no other course than to stand by the advice I had given the day after my return from Russia. I endeavoured to make a statement of the position as I found it in Russia and since my return, both pro and con. It is absolutely impossible to estimate what decision the Conference will reach. If you would like to see me at its conclusion, I shall leave myself at your disposal for an appointment.

Yours sincerely,

ARTHUR HENDERSON."

In the voting at the afternoon session the effect of Mr. Henderson's plea was to persuade the British Labour Party to reverse its previous decision and resolve by more than three to one in favour of being represented at Stockholm.

The War Cabinet considered this situation the same evening. Mr. Henderson was not present. He had avoided the meetings of the Cabinet since the one on Wednesday, 8th August, to which I have referred, when he had learned that no delegates could legally go to Stockholm, and that the Cabinet was opposed to British representation there. In face of the report of the Labour Conference vote, the Cabinet renewed its determination not to allow British representation at Stockholm, and decided to approach the French, Italian and United States Governments informing them of the decision.

At this meeting a communication was read from M. Albert Thomas, stating that a telegram had been received from Petrograd to the effect that the Provisional Government had disinterested itself in the Stockholm Conference, and that M. Kerensky desired that it should not meet.

There remained to be considered the position of Mr. Henderson. Feeling in the War Cabinet was very strong as to his action in thus publicly urging upon British Labour the adoption of a course to which we were definitely opposed, and one which we considered, in common with our Allies, to be detrimental to our position and war interests. Although I was profoundly unwilling to ask for his resignation, it seemed in the circumstances impossible to avoid taking firm action. We decided that I should send him a letter of remonstrance, the terms of which were agreed by the War Cabinet, and that for the time being he should not be summoned to Cabinet meetings nor have Cabinet documents circulated to him. Before actually dispatching the letter, however, we agreed to make further enquiry from the Russian Embassy about the use which could be made of M. Nabokoff's communication of the 8th August.

When we met again on Saturday morning, the 11th August, there were two new factors in the situation. Mr. Henderson had tendered his resignation, at the same time informing me that he continued to share my desire that the War should be carried to a successful conclusion, and that he trusted to be able still to assist us to this end in a non-Governmental capacity. And M. Nabokoff had given us full permission to publish the communication from the Russian Government, so long as his name was not mentioned.

I replied to Mr. Henderson's letter of resignation as follows:—

“ 11th August, 1917.

My dear Henderson,

I am in receipt of your letter of this morning, tendering your resignation of your position as a member of the War Cabinet, and have received the permission of His Majesty, to whom I submitted your resignation, to accept it. My colleagues and I have received with satisfaction the assurance of your unabated desire to assist in the prosecution of the War to a successful conclusion, and they



greatly regret that you can no longer be directly and officially associated with them in that enterprise. There are, however, certain facts with which it is essential that the public should be acquainted in order that they may form a correct appreciation of the events that have led to this regrettable conclusion.

The first is that your colleagues were taken completely by surprise by the attitude which you adopted at the Labour Conference yesterday afternoon. You knew that they were, in the present circumstances, unanimously opposed to the Stockholm Conference, and you had yourself been prepared to agree to an announcement to that effect some days ago. At your suggestion however, and that of your Labour colleagues, it was decided to defer any such announcement until after the meeting yesterday. I was under the impression, after several talks with you, that you meant to use your influence against meeting enemy representatives at Stockholm. What has happened in Russia during the last few weeks has materially affected the position in reference to that Conference. You admitted to me that the situation had completely changed even within the last fortnight, and that whatever ground you might have thought there was for delegates from Allied countries attending such a Conference a fortnight ago, the events of the last few days had shown you the unwisdom of such a course. That was clearly what you led me to believe; it was also the impression left on the minds of your colleagues in the Cabinet and of your Labour colleagues in the Ministry. It was therefore with no small surprise that I received a letter from you yesterday afternoon stating that you 'ought to inform me that after the most careful consideration you had come to the conclusion that you could take no other course than to stand by the advice you had given the day after your return from Russia,' and that your colleagues subsequently read the speech which you had delivered.

Surely this was a conclusion of which you ought to have informed the Cabinet before you entered the Conference. When you spoke at that Conference you were not merely a member of the Labour Party, but a member of the Cabinet, responsible for the conduct of the War. Nevertheless, you did not deem it necessary to inform the Conference of the views of your colleagues, and the delegates were accordingly justified in assuming that the advice you gave was not inconsistent with their opinions.

The second point is this. Yesterday morning we received a most important communication from the Russian Government, in which we were informed that 'although the Russian Government did not deem it possible to prevent Russian delegates from taking part in the Stockholm Conference, they regarded it as a Party concern and its decisions as in no wise binding on the liberty of action of the Government.' And further the covering letter which

accompanied this communication contained these words: 'I hasten to lay before you the above information, as I fear that the impression has hitherto prevailed that, in the words of one of the London newspapers, "Russia ardently desired the Stockholm Conference," and this argument has been put forward in order to influence British public opinion in favour of the Labour and Socialist Parties of Great Britain participating in the Conference.'

Immediately on receipt of this intimation, I sent it over to you with a request that you should communicate it to the Conference. You omitted to do so. It is true that in the course of your speech you made a very casual reference to 'some modification' in the attitude of the Russian Government; but there is a manifest difference between the effect which would necessarily be produced upon any audience by an indifferent summary of that description and the communication to them of official information showing that the attitude of the Russian Government towards the Stockholm Conference was very different from what had been supposed.

In these circumstances, your action does not appear to have been fair either to the Government or to the delegates whom you were addressing. They were left in ignorance of a vital fact which must necessarily have affected their judgment.

I am sending a copy of this correspondence to the Press.

Yours sincerely,

D. LLOYD GEORGE."

It was of course inevitable that Parliament should discuss the situation which had arisen, and a debate upon Mr. Henderson's resignation took place as soon as the House of Commons began its Orders of the Day on Monday, 13th August. In preparation for this debate the Cabinet reviewed the situation that morning, and decided that Mr. Balfour should have a personal interview with Mr. Henderson before he made his statement, to arrange with him how far he could make public use of the private official information concerning the issue. We felt that Mr. Henderson, being on his defence, should be given all facilities for utilising as much of the information as was necessary to his case and compatible with the public interest.

In the course of our Cabinet discussion we reviewed the circumstances which had brought it about that while in May we were prepared to consider allowing delegates to go to Stockholm, in July we were definitely opposed to the Conference. We noted that the reason for this change of attitude was that in May the Russian Government were in the hands of the Workmen's and Soldiers' Committee, and, under its influence, were then inclined strongly in favour of the Stockholm Conference, and that the British Government were, in this matter, to a great extent influenced by their

desire to support the authority of a newly-formed body which had not yet firmly established itself. The consequence of the influence exerted by the Soviet, however, had been to shatter the discipline of the Russian Army and the organisation of the nation, and the Russian Government were at the moment taking measures to re-establish discipline in their forces by means which were absolutely contrary to the principles of the Soviet, and showed that the policy of the extreme revolutionaries had been discredited.

To permit the attendance of British representatives at the Stockholm Conference, which was tantamount to countenancing fraternisation between one section of the Allied British public and one section of the enemy public, would be very prejudicial to the policy which the Russian Government were engaged on and were pressing forward, the very first item of which was the prohibition of fraternisation between Russian troops and those of the enemy.

It was recognised that no difficulty would be found in proving, on the above lines, that the conditions had completely changed since May, 1917, but that there would be considerable difficulty in doing so without embarrassing M. Kerensky.

This last point was the really difficult aspect of the problem. M. Kerensky was still struggling with the power of the Soviet, and to some extent dependent on its goodwill. He dare not announce his open opposition to it without putting himself in the gravest peril from a body which was always rousing the mob with the cry of a danger of counter-revolution, and used bomb and revolver freely to dispose of opponents. Indeed, he found it necessary to declare in an interview published a few days later by the *Daily News* that he was not opposed to the Stockholm Conference, and in fact that he thought it of great importance. Any other statement would probably have shortened his life.

The debate in the House on the Monday afternoon added little fresh to the story. The chief fact that emerged from Mr. Henderson's statement was that evidently he had stubbornly made up his mind to press through the decision in favour of the Stockholm Conference, and that the various contretemps, such as the friction with his Cabinet colleagues before he went to Paris, and his detention on the doormat of the Cabinet room after his return thence, had only stiffened his determination. He failed to make it clear why he had lain low and said nothing of this resolve at the Cabinet meeting where it had been clearly settled that delegates would not be allowed to go to Stockholm. He suggested that if we had forced him to resign on the issue of Stockholm before the Labour Conference on Friday, it would have made the vote in favour of Stockholm only more emphatic.

My own speech was carefully restrained, for I did not want to add any avoidable bitterness to the situation. I expressed regret that



Mr. Henderson had left his colleagues in ignorance of his real attitude on the issue. I regretted that he had seen fit to slur over the important communication from Russia, despite my request to him to communicate it to the Conference, and I hinted the strong reasons, based on the Russian situation and the attitude of our other Allies, for abandoning the Stockholm proposal. Mr. Asquith followed me with a tactful speech, appreciating Mr. Henderson's past services but agreeing that an impossible situation had now arisen, and expressing his confidence in the fundamental soundness of Labour in regard to the War, despite this momentary discord.

About a week later, on 21st August, the Labour Party resumed its Conference, and took a fresh vote on Stockholm. It is significant of the lack of enthusiasm for Stockholm amongst the rank and file of organised Labour that whereas on 10th August they had voted in favour of participation by 1,846,000 to 550,000—a majority of 1,296,000—on this occasion, despite whatever feeling was roused by the circumstances of Mr. Henderson's resignation in the meantime, the vote was 1,234,000 to 1,231,000—a majority of only 3,000 in favour of Stockholm. This was in spite of a powerful and aggressive speech at the Conference by Mr. Henderson, defending his attitude and re-affirming the desire of M. Kerensky for the Stockholm Conference to take place.

The whole story is an unhappy one. Of Mr. Henderson's fundamental goodwill and sound patriotism there was never any question. When he left the Government all his colleagues profoundly regretted that he found it necessary to depart. But they realised that it was inevitable in view of the complicated situation in Russia and its disturbing effect on the attitude of labour throughout the Allied countries.

The revolutionary movements which sprang up here in 1917 caused us for the time a good deal of anxiety and made urgent demands on our powers of statesmanship and tact.

## CHAPTER LIX

### PROBLEMS OF LABOUR UNREST

OF all the problems which Governments had to handle during the Great War, the most delicate and probably the most perilous were those arising on the home front. The issue in prolonged wars has always depended largely on the spirit of the peoples who waged them. That axiom was more applicable to this struggle than to any other war of which records exist, for the whole manhood—and womanhood—of the belligerent nations were organised for war and had been drawn into the war machine. Armies might gain successes or meet with reverses; but once great nations had become thus mobilised for war, they could not be forced to surrender unless their home front broke down. That happened to Russia. In the end it befell Bulgaria, Austria and finally Germany. To guard against it happening to Britain was the most anxious preoccupation of statesmanship here.

In a modern industrial State, the vast bulk of the population consists of wage-earners and those dependent on them. Since Britain is the most highly industrialised State in the world, the contentment and co-operation of the wage-earners was our vital concern, and industrial unrest spelt a graver menace to our endurance and ultimate victory than even the military strength of Germany. In this respect we started the War under a heavy handicap. Its outbreak came at a time when disturbances in the ranks of British labour were more serious and widespread than they had been at any time since the rise of large-scale industrial organisation. The old industrial tyranny of the nineteenth century was breaking up. A new and hopeful spirit of justifiable discontent was abroad, fostered by the spread of education. It was accorded sympathetic treatment by the Government of the day in their attitude to social questions and the ameliorative legislation they had enacted. But this did not satisfy the new spirit of dissatisfaction with economic conditions. Workers were agitating for a higher standard of life and a more dignified status than they had endured in the past. From 1911 onwards there was a steady development of strike action, and in the summer of 1914 there was every sign that the autumn would witness a series of industrial disturbances without precedent. Trouble was threatening in the railway, mining, engineering and building

industries. Disagreements were active, not only between employers and employed, but in the internal organisation of the workers. A strong "rank and file" movement, keenly critical of the policy and methods of the official leaders of Trade Unionism, had sprung up and was gaining steadily in strength. Such was the state of the home front when the nation was plunged into war.

Happily for us, the shock of the national peril brought about a prompt and hearty truce between these warring interests. The trade union leaders proclaimed an industrial peace for the duration of the conflict. Strikes then in progress were brought quickly to an end. The autumn programme of labour disturbances was abandoned, and the trade unions decided to postpone for the time being their demands for higher wages and altered conditions. There was a higher rate of recruitment amongst the workers in some of the disturbed areas than even in districts which knew nothing of strikes and lock-outs.

But if the immediate threat of unrest based on peace-time issues was thus dissolved in the waters of world conflict, there were new troubles and problems of infinite complexity created for us by the conditions under which industry had to be carried on in a world war. Its peace-time structure was shaken to chaos. There was a general post among the workers. Wages, hours, trade union customs and regulations went by the board. The population was violently redistributed and set to unfamiliar tasks. How to control this shifting confusion, to force it into orderly channels, to seek out and eliminate the manifold discomforts, grievances, injustices and anomalies which it produced before they bred disaffection and revolt, were tasks that exercised our unrelenting attention.

One main root of the problem was the circumstance that war divided the nation into two sections. On the one hand were those millions of men who had volunteered or been conscripted for the armed forces of the Crown. On the other, were the millions left in civil life. The recruits were drawing the slender Army pay, were subject to rigorous military discipline, and were called on to face danger, death and limitless discomfort in a service where working hours might extend all round the clock, and where an attempt to strike work might be dealt with by a firing squad. The Revolutionary Government of Russia resorted to this ultimate sanction of military discipline just as ruthlessly as the "bourgeois" Governments of the West. The civilians could enjoy domestic comfort and personal freedom, and make excess profits or earn extra wages too, that were often far bigger than anything they had known in peace-time—and certainly much greater than the pay drawn by their comrades who were fighting in the trenches. Between these two sections of the nation it was impossible to hold the scales even, and impose on them an equality of sacrifice. The full use made of the voluntary system



before we imposed conscription had the result that in the later years of the War an increasingly high proportion of those still in civil life were men who were averse to military service, so that our measures to secure further recruits from them to maintain the strength of our Armies encountered an ever-stiffening resistance.

Theoretically, no doubt, the logical solution of the difficulty would have been to conscript the whole nation at a blow, and place alike the military and the civil sections under the same kind of control. But a moment's reflection will show that this logical solution was utterly impracticable. We had not the Continental tradition and habitude due to a century of conscription. Our civilian structure, industrial, commercial, professional, counting occupations which ran into many thousands of different classes and varieties, from the great factory to the village carpenter, could not have been brought under the rigid discipline that was possible and necessary in trenches within range of the enemy's gunfire. The ideal of nation-wide conscription for the varied tasks of national defence could be adopted as a principle which would justify all useful and feasible measures of Government control. But it could not be applied in the sense of enforcing a genuine equality of sacrifice and sanction as between those who went out as soldiers and those who stayed at home in civilian life. Nor could you equip those who were in charge of the operations of industry at home with the autocratic authority vested in officers in the field. Civilian occupations continued to be on the peace-term basis of employer and wage-earner.

But they were brought under governmental supervision to an unprecedented and revolutionary extent. The State arrogated to itself the supreme right to direct, control, divert, restrict, or even suppress any industry wherever the national interest called for any such action. Sometimes it exercised all these powers. Direct production in old, extended, and improvised arsenals increased enormously, and the numbers of State employees multiplied manifold. Woolwich spread and extended by square miles. New factories and workshops employing scores of thousands of workers were set up by the State to produce guns, shells, explosives, bombs, aeroplanes, and every kind of war material. In most of these the management was under the direction of State officials, and incidentally, in economy and efficiency these men were an acknowledged success. Hundreds of other factories and workshops were commandeered by the State for war work, but neither the ownership nor the management was changed. The railways were placed under Government control without any change in ownership or staff. The same thing applied to the shipping of this country. The general policy of these concerns was subordinated to the decision of the Government to place the interests of State and war first and foremost. Subject to that principle the owners retained the management of their businesses. The same

policy was pursued with the production and distribution of food. The means of production and distribution were left in private hands so long as the owners conformed to the demands and orders of the State. The system was neither Stalin nor Roosevelt. It fell short of the former's ideas, but went beyond those of the latter. Many still think that it was more practical than either. It certainly produced prompter results, and that is what matters most in war.

Subject to these modifications, private enterprise was left to carry on its business during the War in accordance with its peace-time practice. Even in those concerns owned and run by the Government, the State was an employer, not a commanding officer. The result was that while the enlisted man was translated into direct and whole-time Government service, the civilian worker remained a more or less independent wage-earner, and was still in most cases employed by a firm operating for private profit, even when its output was required by the Government. The soldier, however small his pay, had no sense of being exploited to provide wealth for a profiteer. The worker, even though his wage was much larger, felt himself a unit in a system which made profits for employers and dividends for shareholders, and suspected that if to help his country he put forth an extra effort, some capitalist would skim the cream of recompense from the increased output.

That extra effort was vitally needed. The War made unprecedented and insatiable demands upon our industrial capacity. The utmost possible production was required from field and factory and mine to supply our needs. At the same time, the fittest and ablest men were being drafted into the Army. Five million of them were withdrawn in the course of the War from civilian occupations; and although a million women were recruited to industry, the country was left woefully short-handed. A definite quickening in the application of labour-saving devices did not supply the deficiency. Under this stress we had no alternative but to adopt an emergency organisation of the labour available; and that meant calling on the workers to abandon for the time being many rights and privileges in regard to hours of work and division of labour which they had won by generations of slow struggle from their employers. Something of this process I have recorded when telling about the development of the Ministry of Munitions.

It was far from easy to achieve that object. The workers had already agreed, for patriotic reasons, to lay aside for a time their campaign for better conditions. On top of that, they were asked to renounce some privileges and protections already won. We had to secure their consent and co-operation by persuasion, not compulsion, for so long as the system of private enterprise prevailed, a worker could not be ordered to his task in the service of a profit-making employer as a soldier could be ordered to the trenches in

the service of his country, even though the worker's task might be as vital for the national safety. The pecuniary rewards of the most exalted Generals did not amount to one-tenth the profit earned by a successful employer of labour. Those who waxed impatient at times with the difficulty we experienced in our dealings with labour during the War, and who thought the Government too lenient and timorous in its methods, ignored this difference, which was the essence of the problem. Our workers were resolute, and quite justifiably so, however ready they were to do their bit for their country, to submit to no regulation which would make them mere platoons of industrial mercenaries under the command of private employers.

Throughout the War, this problem of the wise handling of labour was one that gave the Government constant anxiety. But by 1917, several causes combined to make it more than ever acute.

Conscription, which had been adopted in the spring of 1916, was now in full operation. The country was being rapidly denuded of its able-bodied manhood, and to supply the insatiable demands of the Army, inroads had to be contemplated on those workers who had hitherto been privileged and exempt by virtue of the national importance of their occupations. Dilution—the substitution of a proportion of unskilled workers in jobs previously reserved exclusively for trained craftsmen—had to be correspondingly extended. Grievances multiplied in regard to wage rates. The growing shortage of food and the difficulty of ensuring a really equitable distribution of the limited supplies, was the most serious grievance of all. The growth of munition works led in some districts to housing shortages and congestion. The meagre supplies of beer and the lightening of its gravity caused much ill-feeling. "Swipes," as it was contemptuously called, was doubly unpopular. It was lacking in kick and quantity. The brewers had not yet had time to make up in quality for the diminution in alcoholic content. The presence of the additional water was too obvious. Owing to heavy taxation the consumer had to pay more for this poor stuff. Whisky was very expensive and the districts that drew inspiration from that fountain complained of the drought. Then among the officials appointed by the Government to carry out its measures, not all were competent and tactful; for the Government, too, had to do the best it could with such people as it could get among a population from which most of the fit and eager men had been skimmed, and the immense tasks of the War compelled the creation of great new departments and staffs. In short, there was an array of causes, great and small, which combined with the general upset of the old order and the griefs and anxieties of the War to breed a spirit of irritation and annoyance.

In this condition the body corporate of the nation was assailed by a new infection. The coming of the Russian Revolution lit up the



skies with a lurid flash of hope for all who were dissatisfied with the existing order of society. It certainly encouraged all the habitual malcontents in the ranks of labour to foment discord and organise discontent. Fishers in troubled waters, they did not create the unrest, but they took full advantage of it. Their activities sprang into special prominence in 1917, and seriously added to our difficulties. In Russia, they pointed out, the workmen formed a separate authority co-ordinate with the Government. There, they were more powerful than the peers in England. Their veto was effective in the administrative as well as in the legislative sphere. They dominated the military activities of the nation. Why not in Britain? That was the question asked in every workshop and at every street corner. The questioners left no doubt as to the answer they would give; and although the common sense of the British workmen provided them with good reasons for a different reply, still the Russian example had its allurements and was therefore disturbing.

This propaganda became closely associated with the Shop Steward Movement, which rose to prominence during the War, and was the active agency in most of the strikes and disturbances with which we had to deal. Of this movement, the development and aggressiveness of which caused acute trouble, a word of explanation is perhaps needed.

Before the War, a number of trade unions had begun the practice of authorising their district committees to appoint a representative member of the union as shop steward in any workshop where a number of members of the union were employed. These shop stewards were the lowest grade in the trade union hierarchy. The following passage from Rule 15 of the pre-War rules of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, as revised in 1913, may be taken as describing their functions. Other trade unions appointing shop stewards adopted rules substantially similar: —

“Committees may also appoint shop stewards in workshops or departments thereof in their respective districts, such stewards to be under the control of the Committee, by whom their duties shall be defined. The stewards shall report at least once a quarter on all matters affecting the trade, and keep the Committee posted with all events occurring in the various shops, and they shall be paid 3s. for each quarterly report; namely, 2s. for duty performed, and 1s. for attendance and report to Committee, these to be payable by the District Committees, and should a shop steward be discharged through executing his duties he shall be entitled to full wage benefit. . . .

District Committees shall also have power to call aggregate meetings, or shop meetings, upon trade questions. . . .”

The job was not an attractive one to the average efficient workman. The remuneration was negligible. The shop steward was liable to

lose time by going round to investigate alleged grievances and infringements of trade union rules and practices, and most men who took on the job lost money by so doing. But it was largely seized on by young men who had become imbued with ideas of increasing the power of the workers as a means of acquiring local influence and carrying on propaganda.

They were a miscellaneous array. Most employers in the early days refused to recognise them, and would only deal with district committees of trade unions. Some shop stewards were appointed by authority of the committees. Some were elected by their fellow members of a union in a shop, but their appointment was never confirmed by the district committee. As the War went on and non-union diluted labour penetrated the shops, numbers of shop stewards were appointed by these new bodies of workers, to watch their interests. In some shops the stewards representing the different craft unions worked for their own men only, even in opposition to stewards of another union. Elsewhere they formed workshop organisations in which the interests of all the crafts employed would be considered jointly. This was particularly developed by those stewards who advocated the amalgamation of the craft unions in large combinations representing the whole body of skilled workers in an industry—as, for example, the National Union of Railwaymen incorporates the various grades of railway workers.

Before the War, neither shop stewards nor workshop organisations had any power as negotiating bodies with employers. But some of them were feeling after that power, and thus rousing the suspicion and antagonism of the established hierarchy of the trade unions. It must be admitted that the machinery of trade unionism was at the time in need of serious overhaul. One can have the heartiest sympathy with the aims of trade unionists, and yet recognise that the forms of organisation they had developed haphazard in their fights of the nineteenth century, and the principles they had sought to lay down for the government of workshop activity, were not always ideal in the interests either of workers or employers. The movement for reform of the system was interrupted by the War. The emergency legislation which restricted the use of the strike weapon still further impaired the authority of the trade union leaders, and gave local agitators opportunities of seizing the reins. These opportunities were increased by the introduction of dilution. For dilution was essentially a workshop problem, and whatever bargain might be come to with trade union officials, the actual arrangements for the introduction of diluted labour had to be made separately in each workshop, by agreement with the skilled workers there. In practice, that meant that they had to be made with the shop stewards, who thus became the key men in negotiations with labour.

In districts where the shop stewards were imbued with syndicalist

notions of "workers' control" of industry, they tended to organise themselves together in a "rank and file" movement, hostile alike to employers and to official trade unionism. The first marked symptom of this new form of labour trouble was shown in the shipbuilding strike on the Clyde, in the winter of 1914-15, where the shop stewards formed a "Central Withdrawal of Labour Committee." As time went on, the tendency grew for the shop stewards in a district or a large works to associate together for common action in local or works organisations, which cut horizontally across the structure of official trades unions. From this there spread the "rank and file" movement, of which the prime agitators were in many cases associated with the I. W. W.,\* a revolutionary syndicalist organisation founded in America, which there sometimes did not hesitate to employ the weapons of arson, sabotage and seditious conspiracy to wage war on capitalism. The rank and file movement was antagonistic to the higher ranks of official trade unionism, and sought to go behind it and educate the rank and file in class-consciousness, stirring them up "to force up wages, force down hours, and insist on such improved conditions of employment that the capitalists will find it cheaper to retire." It found sympathy and support in a powerful section of the British Socialist Party and the Independent Labour Party, which were opposed to the War.

This was the movement which, in 1917, fomented many of the labour troubles with which the Government was faced. It held its first Conference at Leeds in November, 1916, when delegates attended from 28 towns. At the second conference, in March, 1917, they came from 36 towns, and at the third, at Manchester, in June, 1917, from 72 towns. The movement caught on especially among the workers in the engineering industry and seriously increased the difficulty of munition production.

The position at this time was that strikes and lock-outs in the industries concerned with munitions had been prohibited by the Munitions of War Act, 1915, and a system of compulsory arbitration substituted. While that measure did not actually prevent any strike from taking place in such works, its effect was that no official strike could be ordered, and any stoppage that occurred was local and unofficial. For some time it did in fact succeed in settling most disagreements and prevent a stoppage. In 1916, the number of working days lost through labour disputes was the lowest for nine years. But with the growth of power of the shop stewards, there was a marked increase during 1917 in the extent of labour stoppages. During the year there were 688 disputes, affecting 860,727 work-people, and causing the loss of 5,966,000 working days. This total, though still well below those of the years 1912-14, showed how serious was the problem, when every day lost diminished the means

\* Independent Workers of the World.



of effective prosecution of the War on land and sea and in the air.

Symptomatic of the kind of trouble we now had to face was the strike of engineers engaged on munition work at Barrow, which broke out on 21st March, 1917, over a grievance in regard to wage rates. The strike was discountenanced by the leaders of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and its allied unions, who instructed the men to resume work at once, pending an arbitration upon their claim. But the men held a mass meeting at which they rejected this advice. Neither the Unions, the employers, nor the Ministry of Labour were able to bring about a settlement, and finally on 2nd April, the War Cabinet considered the matter further, and decided that the time had come to take strong measures. We resolved that a Proclamation, calling on the Barrow workmen to return to work within 24 hours, should be issued that afternoon (2nd April). If the men did not return the shop stewards who brought the men out on strike should be arrested under Regulation 42 of the Defence of the Realm Act for the impeding of the production of war material. When the men had returned, negotiations should at once be opened for settling their grievance as to piece rates.

The Barrow workers immediately responded to this by offering to send a deputation of their shop stewards to London to discuss their grievances; and the Ministry of Labour agreed to receive them on condition that the men first resumed work. This they did, and a settlement was duly reached on the issues in dispute. But a fortnight's work had been lost.

Far more serious were the series of engineering strikes which broke out in April and May, 1917. These were in the first instance precipitated by the stupid and improper action of a Rochdale firm, which turned some women munition workers on to commercial work, for which the principle of dilution had not been accepted by the trade unions. It ignored a warning protest from the Ministry of Munitions, and followed up its action by dismissing some of its men, while retaining the women dilutees. The directors were of that stubborn, autocratic type that was in its way at least as dangerous to industrial peace as the worst communist agitator. They would not deal with the trade unions. They informed the representative of the Ministry of Munitions, when he called to expostulate and bring about a settlement, that "as they had run their own business for many years themselves, they did not intend to alter their methods for the Ministry or anyone else; if they were to be forced to give way to the trade unions, they would close the works."

Eventually there seemed no other course but to prosecute the firm for breach of the Munitions of War Act. But action was delayed by the Ministry as long as possible, in the hope that the firm would respond to appeals made to it to modify its attitude. Meantime the workers of the firm had handed in their notices and on 29th April,

a mass meeting at Rochdale decided to strike in sympathy with them. Next day the shop stewards in Manchester induced the workers in the engineering shops there to join the strike. By 5th May, 60,000 men were on strike in Lancashire, and in the course of the next few days the strikes spread to Sheffield, Rotherham, Derby, Crayford, Erith, Woolwich and through the London district. While the original strike in Lancashire was based on opposition to dilution in non-government work, elsewhere the shop stewards seized the moment to protest against the withdrawal of the Trade Card system.

Although the Government brought the Rochdale firm to heel, and made satisfactory terms with the authorities of the A.S.E. regarding the conditions under which the Trade Card was to be superseded, the strikes persisted. The Ministry could not negotiate direct with the shop stewards without betraying the recognised officials of the trade unions, who were being defied by the ringleaders of the strikes. The grievance of the workers was removed by the peremptory action of the Ministry and the stoppage at Rochdale ended on 8th May. But in Manchester, Merseyside, Sheffield and the London district it continued, and attempts were made to stop the power houses. The situation was repeatedly considered in the War Cabinet. On 16th May, we decided that the Government should adhere to its policy of recognising only the constituted authorities of the Trades Unions, and that no deputation from the shop stewards should be received except at the request of the executive of the Union.

On the following day we had a conference at Downing Street, at which we decided to take action against ten of the most violent ringleaders of the strikes. Eight of them were promptly arrested and placed in Brixton jail. The other two went into hiding. Consultations followed immediately between the officials of the A.S.E. and a conference of the unofficial strike committees, then gathered at Walworth, which resulted in a joint deputation from both bodies to the Ministry of Munitions, at which agreement was reached for the conclusion of the strikes. In most centres work was resumed forthwith, and after the arrested shop stewards had been released on 23rd May, giving an undertaking to abide by the agreement, the remaining men went back to work.

The strikes were ended. But they had caused a serious set-back to our production of munitions. They had spread to the engineering shops of 48 towns; they had involved nearly 200,000 men, and caused the loss of 1,500,000 working days—more than the total of men affected and days lost in the engineering and shipbuilding trades between the outbreak of the War and the eve of the strike. It was useless to put the blame for these troubles merely on syndicalist agitators. The agitators had played their disastrous part; but they would have been powerless unless there had been genuine discontent among the workers, and unless here and there some employers like

the ones to which I have already alluded, gave provocation by arrogant unwisdom. I recognised that the only way to ensure peace was to remove the real causes of grievance and ill-feeling. The workers were sound at heart. This had been clearly shown at the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, held in January, 1917, at Manchester. At that assembly, a resolution approving the action of the Party leaders in joining the second Coalition Government was carried by 1,849,000 votes to 307,000. Another, declaring in favour of a fight to a finish against German domination, was carried by 1,036,000 votes against 464,000. On the other hand, a resolution breathing class antagonism and distrust, and calling for the reconstitution of the Socialist International with a view to controlling the peace settlement, was rejected by 1,498,000 to 696,000 votes.

The majority of workers were opposed to any weakening of the national unity or authority. But there was a real danger that the hardships, anomalies and annoyances of the times might be worked up by trouble-makers to wear down their sense of patriotic duty. Some of their grievances might be trivial; but a succession of pin-pricks can be more exasperating than a violent blow. Information was reaching me from a different quarter about the growth of industrial discontent. The late Master of Balliol, A. L. Smith, who was very much in touch with labour, wrote warningly to one of the Ministers on the subject of working-class discontent, and said of the men from whom he had gleaned his information:—

“They are men with exceptional opportunities of judging, and none of them are alarmists, and all deeply uneasy about the situation. ‘A spark may make an explosion’ as they put it. ‘Neither class knows how angry the other is.’

Meantime the talk about following the example of Russia is being heard everywhere. All agree that the right man sent down at once on the spot to hear both sides and give some real guarantee and not mere promises would settle matters.”

Another correspondent, a prominent business man, wrote to one of my ministerial colleagues about the prevalent unrest, stating in the course of his letter:—

“At the present moment a very large number, if not the majority of the firms who are working for the Ministry of Munitions are seething with discontent. . . .

When Mr. Lloyd George first instituted the Ministry of Munitions, he stated that it was to be a Ministry without red tape, and the success of the Department in its early days was extraordinary. Every contractor was intent only on giving his best, and one of the marvels of the War was the wonderful response



and the rapidly increasing output from contracting firms under his sympathetic handling. But unfortunately . . . red tape is now rampant. . . .”

I determined to have a careful and sympathetic examination carried out to find what real and justifiable causes of unrest were present. This intention I announced in the course of a speech which I made in the House of Commons on 25th May, 1917, when I said:—

“The termination of the strike affords a very good opportunity for reviewing the whole of the labour position. . . .

I trust that as far as the particular dispute which occasioned that strike is concerned, it has been happily terminated, but I agree that there is a good deal of matter for further investigation. There has been great unrest in some quarters. The Government have their views as to how that has been fostered, but at the same time there are some genuine grievances which have assisted the designs of those who have got ulterior motives which have no special reference to the Labour situation, and therefore the Government have decided to appoint a Commission of Enquiry into the industrial unrest, to enquire and report upon the operation of all the war emergency legislation of the Government and its administration in regard to labour, and to make recommendations which will tend to minimise industrial unrest, especially in the shipbuilding and engineering trades, during the continuation of the War. It is proposed to divide the country into something like seven areas, and to appoint separate Commissions to investigate the causes of unrest in each of those various areas. An effort will be made to secure the services of a labour representative and of an employer, with an impartial chairman in each case. We thought it was better to divide the country into seven areas, inasmuch as it would be impossible for any Commission to cover the whole ground in anything like reasonable time; and . . . to investigate the industrial unrest in each of those areas, with a view to advising the Government whether it is desirable to make any alterations either from the administrative point of view or to recommend legislative changes in this House.”

As a matter of fact, the area Commissions appointed were ultimately eight in number. Each of them had an experienced and responsible man of independent standing as Chairman, and supporting him, an employer and a labour representative. Their Minute of Appointment was signed on 12th June, 1917. I urged them to do their best to carry out their investigations and complete their reports in a month, and gave them a completely free hand to adopt whatever procedure they should each consider best calculated to enable them to discharge their task as quickly and efficiently as possible.

By this method I hoped to get the information which would help us to deal with real grievances. It would not, of course, remove the troubles arising from the intrigues of deliberate mischief-makers. On 26th May, 1917, I received from a colleague a letter which he said had come from a man "whose information about the state of feeling in the labour world I have always found very reliable." This correspondent said:—

"During the last few weeks the Independent Labour Party in conjunction with the Union of Democratic Control, have made a very big stride forward, and we are finding it extraordinarily difficult. . . . Their immediate object has been to bring about a strike, followed by rioting of such a nature that troops would be obliged to fire, and from this they hoped to evolve a general strike, which would bring the whole War up with a jerk here, in much the same manner as the revolution had stopped all military proceedings in Russia. . . ."

The writer went on to attribute the recent success of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and his allies in working up discontent to the fact that over 100,000 young unmarried men, who had taken shelter in reserved occupations, were now afraid of being combed out, and were strenuously supporting the U.D.C. and the I.L.P. in every revolutionary measure likely to hamper the Government and stop the War, in order to save themselves from the trenches.

Confirmation as to the attitude taken up in this quarter was promptly supplied by the action of the Independent Labour Party and the British Socialist Party (from which the pro-War members had recently seceded) in summoning a joint Convention to meet at Leeds on Sunday, 3rd June, 1917, "to hail the Russian Revolution and to organise the British Democracy to follow Russia," as the *Labour Leader* described it in headlines. A letter summoning this Convention, signed on behalf of "the United Socialist Council" by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and other leaders of left-wing Socialism, was addressed on 23rd May, 1917, to Trades Councils, Trade Unions, Local Labour Parties, Socialist Parties, Women's Organisations, and Democratic Bodies. It announced that the Convention would:—

"begin a new era of democratic power in Great Britain. *It will begin to do for this country what the Russian Revolution has accomplished in Russia.*"

Four resolutions were propounded for this Convention. The first was designed to hail the Russian Revolution. The second, on foreign policy and war aims, called on the British Government "immediately to announce its agreement with the declared foreign policy and war aims of the democratic Government of Russia." The third, on civil

liberty, demanded, among other things, a general amnesty for all political prisoners and the release of labour from all forms of compulsion and restraint. The fourth, which attracted most attention, *called for the establishment, in every town, urban and rural district, of Councils of Workmen's and Soldiers' delegates, and proposed:—*

*“that the conveners of this Conference be appointed a Provisional Committee, whose duty shall be to assist the formation of local Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils and generally to give effect to the policy determined by this Conference.”*

Nervousness was expressed in some quarters as to the possible outcome of the Leeds Conference and I was urged to prohibit it, but I thought that it would be a mistake to treat it too seriously. The only measure taken by the Government was to support the War Office in its ban on soldiers in uniform attending. Events proved that we had gauged it aright. The Conference was largely attended and seemed imposing, and its resolutions were carried by sweeping majorities. But as very many of the “delegates” attending it were individual enthusiasts who came without authority or instructions from any organised bodies, their votes bound no one but themselves. The leaders were mostly men of the type which think something is actually done when you assert vociferously that it must be done. The most important result of the Convention was the irritation it roused among the members of the Sailors' and Firemen's Union, who were indignant that it had declared against demanding any compensation from the Germans for sailors murdered in the U-boat campaign. They held a protest conference of their own in the course of the following week, and resolved not to man any vessel on which peace delegates should sail who adhered to this attitude. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was himself the chief sufferer from this. He thought it would be better for him to be out of England when the Leeds resolutions to set up revolutionary machinery on the Russian model were put into operation. His part of the business was accomplished. He had helped to summon the meeting. He had delivered a resonant speech to the delegates. Action was not in his line. So he decided to be out of the way. He resolved to visit Russia and Stockholm. As I relate elsewhere, the seamen refused to take him there, despite the request of the Government, and insisted on keeping him in England, where, knowing him better than I did, they felt certain he would be harmless.

The sailors were risking their lives to help the country through its agony. The Russian convulsion had undoubtedly upset the equilibrium of the worker everywhere. We felt it in our coal mines and in our munition works when everything depended upon the whole-hearted energy and co-operation. There were disputes and misunderstandings which had a perceptible effect upon the output of





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(Reproduced by courtesy of "Punch.")

"Hoist with his own Petard."

MR. RAMSAY MACDONALD (*Champion of Independent Labour*): "Of course I'm all for peaceful picketing—on principle. But it must be applied to the proper parties."

The sailors refuse to take Mr. Ramsay MacDonald to the Stockholm Conference.

material essential to victory. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald had done his best by speeches, by writings, by clandestine manœuvring and stimulating organisation to accentuate difficulties. The sailors knew there were men of like mind and purpose in Russia who were striving to persuade their fellow-countrymen to break faith with the nations which had come to the aid of theirs at a critical moment. And quite frankly, the seamen thought they were serving their country by preventing people of this sort from coming together to foment mischief at this critical hour. They did not trust Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's patriotism. Can you blame them?

The English Revolution on Russian lines which was to start up passed off thus with little damage done. The Commissions on Industrial Unrest made rapid progress with their investigation into the genuine causes of uneasiness, and by or before the 12th July, the reports of all the eight Commissions had been completed, though a further supplementary report by the North-Western Area Commissioners on the Barrow-in-Furness District could not be sent in until the 16th. On 17th July, Mr. George Barnes, the Minister of Labour, was able to submit to me all these nine reports, together with his summary of their contents.

A reassuring feature of these was their agreement that:—

“There is a strong feeling of patriotism on the part of employers and employed throughout the country, and they are determined to help the State in its present crisis. Feelings of a revolutionary character are not entertained by the bulk of the men. On the contrary, the majority of the workmen are sensible of the national difficulties. . . .”

Mr. Barnes in his summary analysed the main causes of industrial unrest, as revealed in the reports. Some of these were universal; others were prominent only in certain localities, and did not appear to be serious elsewhere.

Among the universal causes of unrest, the most serious was agreed by all the Commissioners to be the high food prices in relation to wages, and the unequal distribution of food. While it was true that certain grades of munition workers were earning far more than they could have hoped to do in peace time, the general level of wages throughout the country had not risen as rapidly as the general cost of living. Indeed, Mr. J. H. Thomas had declared that the railwaymen would be willing to forgo the increases in wages they had received if they could be placed back on the old price level for the living costs. When to this was added in the workers' minds a suspicion that someone was profiteering at their expense, and the fact that sometimes they could not obtain needed articles of food even if they had the money, while they knew that others were getting them, the food grievance became not only a leading cause of unrest in

itself, but "its existence in the minds of the workers colours many subsidiary causes, in regard to which, in themselves, there might have been no serious complaint."

The operation of the Munitions of War Acts, and in particular the restriction upon the mobility of labour through the system of the leaving certificate, was another universal cause of unrest. A worker engaged on munitions production could not leave his employer to take up work with someone else unless the employer gave him such a certificate, consenting to his leaving; if he left without this, no one else could employ him for six weeks. "Workmen have been tied up to particular factories and have been unable to obtain wages in relation to their skill. In many cases the skilled man's wage is less than the wage of the unskilled." The leaving certificate had been adopted to deal with a special emergency. It had already served its purpose. When conscription had been brought into force for the Army, there was no further need for the leaving certificate, and the Government had already decided to abolish it. Complaint was also made that the conditions laid down by the Munitions of War Acts in regard to the introduction of dilution and the altering of working conditions were not being observed by some employers, who played fast and loose with the regulations, and failed to consult their workers as they were required by the law to do, when making such arrangements.

A third general grievance was the way in which the Military Service Acts were being operated. It illustrates the difficulties which a country not accustomed to universal military training is bound to experience in war. It was of course inevitable that as the demand for recruits grew, men previously exempted by virtue of their occupation should be called up. At one time all the men engaged in certain essential forms of work such as munitions, shipbuilding, mining, railways and agriculture had been exempt. When it became necessary to claim some of the younger men for the army, taking them from safe and well-paid jobs in which they had thought themselves to be secure for the duration of the War, to the dangers and discomforts of the trenches, they were not only disgruntled; they felt that a kind of government promise was being broken.

The annoyance caused by the necessity of calling up some of the young, fit men engaged in the less skilled operations of industries formerly exempted was unavoidable. But it was aggravated by a conviction, based on glaring if exceptional instances, that the wrong men were in some cases being taken, and that pledges given to the Trade Unions in respect of the calling-up of diluted labour before skilled members of the crafts were taken, were not being faithfully kept. High-handed action by officers in charge of recruiting was reported, and there was widespread complaint that when grievances were referred to tribunals and arbitration boards or the Government



departments, the delay in settlement was intolerable, and could only be cut short by a strike.

Further, there were other serious causes of unrest found in some, though not all areas, among which were mentioned:—

- The want of sufficient housing accommodation in congested areas;
- The liquor restrictions;
- Industrial fatigue, due to Sunday and overtime work;
- Want of confidence in the fulfilment of Government pledges;
- Lack of consideration by some employers of their women workers;
- Delays in granting pensions to soldiers;
- Inadequacy, at present price levels, of the compensation payable under the Workmen's Compensation Act.

The recommendations of the Commissioners were summarised by Mr. Barnes as follows:—

- (1) Food Prices.—There should be an immediate reduction in price, the increased price of food being borne to some extent by the Government, and a better system of distribution is required.
- (2) Industrial Councils, etc.—The Principle of the Whitley Report should be adopted; each trade should have a constitution on these lines.
- (3) Changes with a view to further increase of output should be made the subject of an authoritative statement by the Government.
- (4) Labour should take part in the affairs of the community as partners, rather than as servants.
- (5) The greatest publicity possible should be given to the abolition of Leaving Certificates.
- (6) The Government should make a statement as to the variation of pledges already given.
- (7) The £1 maximum under the Workmen's Compensation Act should be raised.
- (8) Announcements should be made of policy as regards housing.
- (9) A system should be inaugurated whereby skilled supervisors and others on day rates should receive a bonus.
- (10) Closer contact should be set up between employer and employed.
- (11) Pensions Committees should have a larger discretion in their treatment of men discharged from the Army.
- (12) Agricultural wages in the Western Area, now as low as 14s. to 17s. a week, should be raised to 25s. a week.
- (13) Coloured labour should not be employed in the ports.
- (14) A higher taxation of wealth is urged by one Commissioner.

“In addition to the above recommendations, the recruiting system is universally regarded as requiring most careful handling. In some areas an increase in the supplies of alcoholic liquor is

demand. The co-ordination of Government Departments dealing with labour is reported as an urgent matter; and an appeal for increase of publicity and fuller explanation of Government proposals is made in several of the reports. . . ."

The findings of these Commissions proved invaluable to the Government in its task of dealing with the grievances of the workers, and allaying industrial discontent.

The problem of the distribution and price of food was of course the special preoccupation of the Food Ministry, the activities of which I have described in another chapter. Food remained a grave and difficult issue throughout the War. Not until a general system of compulsorily rationing the consumer was introduced, were we able to surmount the difficulties of securing an approximately fair distribution of the available supplies. When compulsory restriction of food supplies was first suggested in the early spring, Labour resistance was so strong that we decided on the recommendation of Mr. Henderson to postpone it. By fixing a maximum price for bread we were able to limit to some extent the mounting cost of living, and something was done for the munition workers by pressing forward the extension of canteens for them, where they could be sure of getting good food at reasonable prices. So successful were we in this that we actually had a complaint by a Member of Parliament on 24th October, 1917, that in one munition area, "the excellence of the arrangements . . . in providing high-class but economical meals to the public is a menace to the existence of privately owned restaurants and cafés!" The objector was informed, in answer, that "we shall certainly do nothing to interfere with the proper provision of food for our munition workers."

The most immediate industrial problem was that of the anomalies in the worker's wage. To secure the acceptance of dilution by the Trade Unions, the Government had promised that the extra hands introduced should be paid the same piece rates as had formerly been received by the skilled Trade Union workers. The result was that as improved processes and mass production methods were introduced, many piece workers earned a very considerable wage, while the experienced skilled men who had trained them, and who were themselves employed on more difficult operations of craftsmanship, paid at time rates, earned much smaller sums. This was a galling situation for the skilled and experienced worker, particularly as the system of the leaving certificate prevented him from throwing up his skilled job and going off to take up a semi-skilled job where he could earn as much as a dilutee.

On 18th July, Dr. Addison left the Ministry of Munitions to become Minister for Reconstruction, and was replaced by Mr. Winston Churchill. Action was immediately taken by him to carry

out the recommendations of the Commission. He introduced an Amending Act to give him the necessary authority to deal with the difficulties. Gradually there was a perceptible improvement in the Labour situation. The feeling of malaise evaporated and a healthier atmosphere was restored.

The satisfactory results of the Munitions of War Act, 1917, were shown by the fact that on 6th November, 1917, the Labour member for Attercliffe, Mr. Anderson, could state in the House of Commons that:—

“We have at this moment a much better atmosphere, in which there is far less industrial tension than there was sometime back. . . . I hold no brief for the present Minister of Munitions. I believe he has his personal and political detractors—I am not concerned with them one way or the other—but in my opinion he has brought courage and a certain quality of imagination to the task of dealing with labour questions since he became Minister of Munitions. Because of that, the situation has perceptibly improved, and I hope he will go on in the same direction. . . .”

The shop steward movement, which continued to cause us trouble throughout the year, had indicated that there was need for a revision of the machinery of negotiation between employers and workers. In this connection an important development of 1917 was the birth of the “Whitley Council.” A Reconstruction Committee had been set up in 1916 by Mr. Asquith, primarily with the object of making preparations for the restoration of peace-time conditions on a sound system when the War ended. I decided that it was desirable to extend considerably its terms of reference. On 15th February, 1917, I announced to the War Cabinet the names of a new Reconstruction Committee, the terms of reference of which should be:—

- (1) To consider the Terms of Reference and composition of the existing Sub-Committees of the Reconstruction Committee.
- (2) To consider what further enquiries should be made in connection with reconstruction.
- (3) To consider reports made to the Prime Minister from the Sub-Committees.
- (4) To recommend to the War Cabinet what immediate action should be taken in connection with the reports of the Sub-Committees.

One of these Sub-Committees, under the chairmanship of the Rt. Hon. J. H. Whitley, M.P., was charged with the study of Relations between Employers and Employed. On 8th March, 1917, it produced a Report in which it proposed the setting-up of “Joint Standing Industrial Councils” in the better-organised industries. The report had a mixed reception from the members of the Reconstruction



Committee. Mr. Montagu, the vice-chairman, was in favour of the proposal. Mrs. Sidney Webb, on the other hand, subjected it to a torrent of destructive criticism, and concluded with the assertion that such Councils could only be set up in the Railway and Postal services; and declared:—

“I cannot imagine that it would be worth while the Government committing itself to such a harmless but insignificant project, or that it could be, with any wisdom, separately promulgated apart from other items in the Government Reconstruction Programme on the Relations of Employers and Employed.”

Mr. Whitley's Committee made prompt rejoinder to her criticisms, and it was eventually decided by the War Cabinet on 7th June, 1917, to circulate the Report to the leading Trade Unions and Employers' Federations, and to the Commissioners on Industrial Unrest, for their views. On 19th June we took the further decision to publish the Report.

The Commissioners on Industrial Unrest took a warmly favourable view of the proposals of the Whitley Committee. Their attitude is well expressed in the following extract from the Report of the Commission on the North-Western Area, which included the very disturbed districts of Lancashire:—

“We have been very much impressed by the report of the Reconstruction Committee on the ‘Relations between Employers and Employed.’ We have had the opportunity of putting before important deputations of employers and men these proposals, and asking their opinion on them. Although they all expressed a natural desire to consider them more fully, yet the principle at the bottom of them was received with cordial approval. This principle, which seems to us to be a statesmanlike proposal of the best method of dealing with unrest, and includes within its scope much that we have already said about the necessity for decentralisation and local control, is set out in Section 14, which, to our mind, is exactly what is needed in this area to allay many causes of Industrial Unrest.”

It was not until the autumn that we had collected from Trade Unions and Employers' Associations a sufficiently large number of replies to satisfy us that there was general approval of the Whitley Report. When this was assured, we announced, on 25th October, 1917, our official adoption of the Report, and expressed our hope that its recommendations would be carried into effect. The Ministry of Labour proceeded to invite employers and workers into conference, in suitable industries, with a view to the setting-up of Joint Industrial Councils. The First National Whitley Council, that for the pottery industry, was announced on 21st December, 1917. In May, 1918, the

Whitley system was introduced into the shipbuilding industry. Engineering held aloof, but continuous efforts throughout 1917 resulted in an agreement on 20th December, 1917, between the Engineering Employers' Federation and a number of trade unions, by which arrangements were made for discussion and negotiation between the employers and works committees of shop stewards. During the latter part of the War and the immediate post-War period, some 73 joint councils were set up in various industries and civil administrations, and they served a very valuable purpose in helping the country through the difficult period of readjustment after the War, though many of them functioned only for a short time, and then fell into abeyance. While a number of industries failed to adapt the system successfully to their particular conditions, Whitleyism has worked admirably in others, and has made a real contribution to industrial harmony.

As one reviews the various causes which led to industrial unrest in 1917, the bewilderments and hardships of the time, war-tiredness, the ghastly losses, the deepening and intensifying horrors of the struggle, the receding horizon of victory, and here and there the clumsiness and arrogance of employers and managers which all helped the insidious efforts to preach sedition and promote disturbance by which the workers of the country were assailed, one is not so much surprised at the extent of trouble which the Government had to face, as at the fact that it was no greater. Russia collapsed altogether in this year. France suffered a mutiny of her troops, a great deal of violent Socialist agitation, and in the last six months of the year, was buzzing with rumours of treasonable plots, which culminated in the arrest of certain prominent journalists, and the levelling of a charge of high treason against M. Malvy, the former Minister of the Interior, and M. Caillaux, an ex-Premier. Italy was seething with disaffection and sedition, which brought about the outbreak of food riots in the autumn, and contributed in a measure to the collapse of the 2nd Army at Caporetto. Germany had a crop of strikes, and in July a mutiny broke out in the navy, of which the object was to force an immediate peace. The Imperial Government only succeeded in keeping the nation quiet by promising very far-reaching constitutional reforms. The same situation developed in Austria. There also a promise of far-reaching reforms had to be made. This undertaking and the victory of Caporetto quieted temporarily the discontent in that Empire.

There can be no question that one outstanding reason for the high level of loyalty and patriotic effort which the people of this country maintained was the attitude and conduct of King George V. I have previously referred to the way in which he encouraged the work of the Ministry of Munitions in its early days, and interested himself in the actual processes of the arsenals and factories,

and the well-being of those engaged in them. In 1917, the King not only maintained but greatly intensified his efforts to come into personal contact with the workers on the home front, and to encourage them in their tasks. The mere list of the visits which he paid to munition factories, shipbuilding yards, and other centres of industrial and social activity would fill several pages of this book. Wherever sorrow fell or trouble threatened, the King made it his business to look into the matter personally. On 4th February, 1917, for example, he went down to Silvertown, where a disastrous explosion had just occurred in a munition works, and visited the bereaved and homeless workers. In March and April, he paid a series of visits to Projectile and Filling Factories in the Home Counties and London district. In May, when the dangerous series of strikes broke out in Lancashire, the King arranged to spend a week touring the areas where the trouble was most acute—Merseyside, the Manchester district, Morecambe and Barrow, and proceeding on to Workington and Gretna, visiting the leading munition factories and shipyards. Doubts were expressed in the War Cabinet as to the wisdom of his action, but I was confident that he would be safe among his own people, and authorised Mr. Arthur Henderson to make arrangements for the King to meet personally the leading trade unionists in each place that he visited. It is significant that the strikes broke down the day after he completed this tour.

In mid-June the King again made an extended tour—this time of the shipyards of the north-east coast, Tyne, Tees and Humber. He visited some two dozen shipbuilding and marine engineering works at Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees, the Hartlepoons, Sunderland, North Sands, Howden, Wallsend, Walker-on-Tyne, North Shields and Hull. We were straining every nerve at that time to expedite shipbuilding in order to make good the disastrous losses we had suffered in the submarine campaign, and the King's visit was of the utmost value in stimulating the shipwrights in their urgent task.

The Clyde was always a danger-spot for labour trouble. In mid-September the King spent four or five days there, and visited more than two dozen shipyards and steelworks. So far as I can recall, neither these nor any other of the innumerable visits he paid during the year to places where industrial unrest was present or threatening were marred by any kind of unpleasantness. On the contrary, the loyalty of the people was heartened to new vigour by the presence of their Sovereign in their midst, and by the warm personal interest he showed in their work and their anxieties. In estimating the value of the different factors which conduced to the maintenance of our home front in 1917, a very high place must be given to the affection inspired by the King, and the unremitting diligence with which he set himself in those dark days to discharge the functions of his high office.



## CHAPTER LX

### ELECTORAL REFORM

THERE were three fierce party conflicts being fought out in Parliament and the country, when the great guns of war roared out their "Halt"—Irish Home Rule, Welsh Disestablishment and the abolition of the plural voter. The two first were suspended until the War was over. There was a practical difficulty which forced us to deal with the third during the War.

Plural Voting was in terms of political partisanship the most controversial of the issues involved in electoral reform. Women's Suffrage, no less controversial, cut across the lines of party division. As to the need for reform of registration and franchise qualifications, and for a redistribution measure, there was fairly widespread agreement. And the support for alterations in the voting system by adoption of proportional representation, second ballot or alternative vote, did not follow strict party alignments. The terms of the resolution under which the Lords first rejected the Plural Voting Bill showed that there was general recognition of the need for some comprehensive revision of the existing system.

The issue was forced to the fore by the circumstance that Parliament was already  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years old when the War broke out. It had been elected, under the Septennial Act, in December, 1910, and had met for the first time on 31st January, 1911. But its first step had been to carry the Parliament Act into law, thereby limiting its own life and that of future parliaments to five years, and it was thus due to end not later than 31st January, 1916.

It was most undesirable, at a moment when it was essential for the nation to hold together and maintain a united front, that an election should be held at which the conflict of rival candidates would bring to the surface every point of difference between groups of citizens upon which an electoral fight could be based. To introduce these divisions into the trenches might have been fatal to the discipline and cohesion essential to an army.

Accordingly, in July, 1915, the Elections and Registration Act was passed, which postponed the holding of municipal elections due to take place that year, and authorised the abandonment of the compilation of a new Register. Mr. Long, when bringing in this Bill, stated

on behalf of the Asquith Coalition Government that we were of opinion that elections should if possible be avoided till the War was over.

In accordance with this attitude, when December, 1915, came and Parliament had by the terms of the Parliament Act only another month to live, its life was prolonged for another year—a period cut down in Committee to eight months, i.e. until 30th September, 1916.

The situation which resulted in 1916 from these steps was in some respects profoundly unsatisfactory. There were few people either inside or outside of Parliament who wished to plunge the country into the distractions and divisions which a General Election would evoke. But on the other hand, acute divisions of opinion on certain important issues were developing between ministers within the Government, and both in the House and in the country a good deal of dissatisfaction was manifesting itself with the way in which the War was being conducted. Should matters become critical, it was essential that the Government should have in reserve the power to appeal to the country for a verdict on its policy and a fresh mandate for its course. Should hostilities suddenly terminate, it would be necessary to consult the country as to the line to be taken in making peace. But if for either of these causes an election were to become necessary at short notice, there was no register available, later than that compiled in 1914, which had come into force in January, 1915. There was no arrangement for enabling men in the Army and Navy who might still be on that register to record their votes if they were out of the country, or for tracing and polling the votes of munition workers. It was generally conceded that no men had a better right to be consulted as to the future of the country than those who had risked their lives for its defence. There was also a growing feeling that the manner in which the women of the country had come forward to work on its behalf, taking the places of men who went to the front, ought to remove the last prejudice of those people—among whom I was not numbered—who had formerly opposed Women's Suffrage.

The approach of September made it necessary for us either to face the prospect of a General Election or to take further action for prolonging the life of the existing Parliament.

Accordingly, on the 14th August, 1916, two Bills were brought before the House of Commons. The first, the Parliament and Local Elections Bill, proposed to extend the life of the existing Parliament for a further eight months—a period later cut down in Committee to seven months. The second, the Special Register Bill, provided for the compiling of a new Parliamentary Register, to be ready in May, 1917, the ordinary statutory dates for sending of precepts, preparation of lists, etc., being varied for this purpose; and further made an extension of the usual provisions for the removal of electoral disabilities, to the effect that soldiers, sailors and munition workers who

would have qualified for inclusion in the register if they had stayed at home should be duly entered on it.

The first of these two measures was duly carried by both Houses, and the life of Parliament extended until 30th April, 1917. But the second measure called forth a lively controversy. It was felt that something rather more far-reaching than the actual provisions of the Bill was wanted to ensure that all the men who were risking their lives in defence of their country should be entitled to vote for the Parliament that would not only determine the terms of peace but the conditions under which the Britain for whom these men had fought should henceforth be governed. But the recognition of this principle raised the further question of women's suffrage, with which the Bill as originally drafted failed to deal. So after some debate had taken place, Mr. Walter Long proposed that the Bill should be dropped, and the Speaker asked to summon a Conference, representing as far as possible all sections of political opinion, to examine the whole question of the Franchise and Electoral Reform, and see whether an agreed settlement of these issues could not be found.

Mr. Lowther accepted this task, and invited some 32 men representing the most varied angles of political thought on the issue in question, and including five members of the House of Lords, to serve in his Conference. It held its first meeting on 12th October, 1916, and promptly got down to a close study of the problems it had been invited to review.

When therefore I became Prime Minister in December, 1916, I had to count among my inheritances a Parliament whose lease of life, already twice extended, ran till the end of the coming April, a Speaker's Conference busily engaged in reviewing the electoral system, and as the only means of electing a new Parliament—if such a step became necessary for any sudden reason—a register compiled in 1914, which omitted the names of hundreds of thousands who had the best of all titles to be electors, and an electoral law which made no provision for recording their votes when they were overseas on their country's business. Clearly it was a state of things which could not be allowed to continue.

On 14th December, 1916, a few days after I had taken charge of the Government, the Speaker approached me to tell me the stage which had been reached in the work of the Conference, and to ask whether we wished them to proceed. I asked him to be good enough to complete the task with all dispatch.

This he did, and the Speaker's Conference held its final meeting—the twenty-sixth—on 26th January, 1917. On the following day Mr. Lowther forwarded to me the report of its findings.

It recommended alterations which would have been regarded as sweeping and sensational even by the Liberal Party as a whole in pre-War days. But there can be no more striking evidence of the change



affected in public opinion by a colossal struggle for freedom which united all classes in one fraternity of effort and sacrifice, than the fact that the great bulk of the revolutionary changes had been approved unanimously by an assembly which included politicians of the most diverse possible views—extreme Tories, rigid Liberals, advanced Socialists. The possibilities of the future can never be accurately judged except by those who have seen mankind operating under the impulse of an intense exaltation of spirit.

The chief of these unanimous recommendations were the following:—

The Register of voters should be revised and brought up to date every six months. The Clerk to the Local Authority (Borough or County Council) should be Registration Officer, and the cost of registration should be borne equally by the rates and the Exchequer.

The ordinary qualification for a vote should be six months' residence in the constituency. Plural voting was not to be altogether abolished, but closely cropped. One vote in a second constituency (apart from the residence vote) might be exercised, in respect either of a qualification as a University voter, or of the occupation of business premises in a constituency other than that where the voter resided.

Proposals were made for a redistribution of seats, and for their grouping as far as possible in constituencies of between three and five members, in which elections should take place by the method of Proportional Representation. The representation of Universities was to be retained.

All elections should take place on one day. Returning officers' expenses should be paid by the Exchequer. Candidates should be required to make a deposit of £150, liable to forfeiture if they polled not more than one-eighth of the votes cast. A reduced maximum scale of candidates' permissible expenses was laid down, and other suggestions made for amending the Corrupt Practices Act.

Men serving with His Majesty's Forces should be entitled to registration as voters in the constituency where they had their home.

In addition to these unanimous recommendations, there were a few on which unanimity could not be attained, but which were adopted by a majority. Among them were the partial removal of disability for electors who had received Poor Law relief; the proposal that in single-member constituencies the election should be by the Alternative Vote; and the making of provision for an Absent Voters' List.

But by far the most important of the issues on which the Conference failed to reach agreement was the question of votes for women. On this, the Speaker reported that:—

“The Conference decided by a majority that some measure of woman suffrage should be conferred. A majority of the Conference was also of opinion that if Parliament should decide to accept the

principle, the most practical form would be to confer the vote in terms of the following resolution:—

Any woman on the Local Government Register who has attained a specified age, and the wife of any man who is on that register if she has attained that age, shall be entitled to be registered and to vote as a parliamentary elector.

Various ages were discussed of which 30 and 35 received most favour.

The Conference further resolved that if Parliament decides to enfranchise women, a woman of the specified age who is a graduate of any University having parliamentary representation shall be entitled to vote as a University Elector."

We now had to face up to the question whether or not it was feasible for us, struggling as we were at that moment in the darkest epoch of the War, to dedicate the thought, the labour and the parliamentary time necessary to carry through legislation based on this report. I have already given some indication of the immense variety of new tasks on which we were just then engaged. From this point of view, the time might well seem the least propitious that could be found for the consideration of a far-reaching measure of domestic legislation and constitutional reform. But on the other hand, we had to consider that the continuing Party Truce gave us a unique opportunity of carrying through an agreed measure; that the remarkable degree of unanimity reached by the Conference augured well for our success; and that in any event some legislation would have to be passed shortly, either to renew the old system of registration or to impose a fresh one, in preparation for the next election.

We felt that before undertaking any large-scale legislation on the basis of the Report, we must be assured that the general opinion of the House of Commons was in favour of such a course being pursued. On 6th February, 1917, the matter was discussed in the War Cabinet, and we decided with one dissentient that the House of Commons should be informed that the situation with regard to Franchise and Registration had obviously been changed by the holding of the Speaker's Conference; that the House of Commons would have a very early opportunity of considering the question, but the exact method must be left for further consideration by the Government, which had during the past week been occupied with business of urgent necessity.

On 20th February, in reply to a question in the House, Mr. Bonar Law stated:—

"It is clear that the House ought to have an early opportunity of deciding what action should be taken in connection with the Report of the Conference over which you, Sir, presided.

After endeavouring to ascertain by unofficial enquiries what course would be most acceptable to the House, the Government have come to the conclusion that the best method of procedure would be that a Resolution or Resolutions embodying its decisions, should be moved on behalf of the Conference.

If a motion to this effect be placed upon the Order Paper, the Government will give an early opportunity for its discussion."

By agreement with the Government Mr. Asquith put down a resolution, approving the Report. Time was allotted for the debate to take place on 28th March.

As was to be expected there was no unanimity amongst the Conservative supporters of the Government on the recommendations of the Speaker's Report. The opposition was essentially one of right-wing Tories. I had been warned to expect it. As far back as 8th March I had received a communication from Sir Edward Carson in which he sent me a resolution signed by over 100 Unionist M.P.'s denouncing the suggestion of electoral reform. His letter was as follows:—

"Admiralty, Whitehall.

8th March, 1917.

My dear Prime Minister,

The enclosed resolution signed by over 100 Unionist Members of Parliament was handed to me to-day and I think it right to bring it to your notice.

Personally I was never in favour of the Speaker's Conference, and declined to have any share in it.

Yours sincerely,

EDWARD CARSON."

The enclosure was in these terms:—

#### "SPEAKER'S REPORT ON ELECTORAL REFORM.

The undersigned members, having considered this Report, desire to represent to the Government:—

(1) That the time is not opportune to consider proposals involving so many and great changes in the Electoral and Registration Law of the country.

(2) That the present Parliament has been prolonged beyond its legal term for the sole purpose of enabling it to deal with questions strictly pertaining to the prosecution of the War, and that it should confine its energies within those limits.

(3) That certain of the proposals must inevitably prove to be of a highly contentious character.



(4) That there has been no sufficient enquiry as to the expediency or practicability of many of the proposed changes.

(5) That no proposals for Franchise Reform and Redistribution which do not include Ireland should be submitted to the Parliament of the United Kingdom."

It was a disconcerting letter to receive from the First Lord of the Admiralty in my own Ministry. But despite this warning I obtained the support of the Cabinet for the resolve to proceed with legislation to enact the recommendations of the Conference. The fact that only a hundred members could be found to sign a protest, proved that five-sixths of the House of Commons (including a majority of the Conservative Party) were in favour of action on the lines of the Speaker's Conference.

On 26th March, the War Cabinet considered the issue, and resolved to go forward with the proposals including Women's Suffrage in spite of the formidable opposition which had developed amongst their supporters. We decided to recommend the House of Commons to adopt the Speaker's Report on Electoral Reform, and to introduce a Bill to carry it out, subject to the following exceptions:—

(a) The question of Women's Suffrage, which should be included in the Bill, but as to which amendments should be left for decision by Parliament in accordance with the views of Members, without putting on the Whips;

(b) The question of Proportional Representation which the Speaker's Conference should be invited to reconsider.

Meantime it was clear that, whatever decision the House of Commons should reach in regard to the proposals of the Speaker's Conference, it would not be possible to carry legislation providing for a new electoral Register, and effect the compiling of such a Register, in time to elect promptly a new Parliament if the existing House were dissolved on 30th April. So on 27th March, 1917, a further "Parliament and Local Elections Bill" was given a first reading, for the purpose of extending the life of Parliament until 30th November, 1917. This was duly carried in the course of April. I may here anticipate subsequent developments by saying that two further reprieves of a similar nature had to be secured for Parliament before the War was over. In November, 1917, its life was extended until 31st July, 1918—a further eight months; and in July it was given six months more. Before that last extension was exhausted, the War was over, and as the new Register was complete there was no justification for further prolonging the life of a Parliament elected on a limited franchise which had already exceeded the term of its constitutional existence by three years. It is one of the little ironies of

history that the very Parliament which enacted a shortening of parliamentary duration from the seven-year period imposed 200 years before by the Septennial Act, should have reprieved itself by successive stages until its own life was longer than that of any since the Long Parliament of 1640.

The debate on the Conference Report was opened on 28th March, 1917, by Mr. Asquith, who moved a resolution in the following terms:—

“That this House records its thanks to Mr. Speaker for his services in presiding over the Electoral Reform Conference, and is of opinion that legislation should be promptly introduced on the lines of the Resolutions reported from the Conference.”

Since Mr. Asquith had himself appointed the Conference, it was eminently suitable that he should move this resolution. He recapitulated the circumstances which had led to its appointment, and the problems with which it had been invited to deal. And he expressed his enthusiastic welcome for its conclusions.

“The result is that we have in this Report what I confess I was hardly sanguine enough to hope for—37 resolutions dealing with all the thorniest problems which have divided Parties and been the subject of embittered controversy during the lifetime of a generation. Of these 37 resolutions, no less than 34 were passed with unanimity. That is one of the most remarkable concordats in our political history. In my opinion it would not only be folly, but it would be something like criminal folly, if we were to throw away such a unique opportunity.”

Before the War Mr. Asquith was one of the most inveterate opponents of Women's Suffrage. It was the only controversial topic that stimulated him to bitterness. His admission, therefore, that the work accomplished by women in the War had led him to change his views on the question of Women's Suffrage, and abandon his opposition to granting them the vote, constituted one of the most dramatic incidents in the Debate.

“During the whole of my political life I have opposed the various schemes which have been presented from time to time to Parliament for giving the Parliamentary vote, whether piecemeal or wholesale, to women. . . . My opposition to woman suffrage has always been based, and based solely, on considerations of public expediency. I think that some years ago I ventured to use the expression. ‘Let the women work out their own salvation.’ Well, Sir, they have worked it out during this War. How could we have carried on the

War without them? Short of actually bearing arms in the field there is hardly a service which has contributed, or is contributing, to the maintenance of our cause in which women have not been at least as active and as efficient as men, and wherever we turn we see them doing, with zeal and success, and without any detriment to the prerogatives of their sex, work which three years ago would have been regarded as falling exclusively within the province of men. . . . I therefore believe, and I believe many others who have hitherto thought with me in this matter are prepared to acquiesce in the general decision of the majority of the Conference, that some measure of women's suffrage should be conferred. . . ."

An Amendment was moved by Mr. Salter, a respected Conservative Member who afterwards became a judge of the High Court, which would have confined our legislative action to a measure to prepare a new register and secure the inclusion of soldiers and sailors in it, with means to record their votes if abroad on service. His attitude represented the point of view of those who did not welcome domestic reforms in wartime, either because they regarded them as an undesirable distraction from our main concern, or because they were opposed to the suggested reforms themselves.

Speaking in support of Mr. Asquith's motion, I gave a review of the electoral situation, and urged that it was of vital importance that we should make a provision whereby the next parliament, which would have to settle the problems of peace and reconstruction, should be really representative of the men and women who had by their effort and suffering made the new Britain possible. The moment a Franchise Bill was brought in, such questions as Plural Voting, University Representation and Women's Suffrage were bound to arise. Since the majority of the House would be on the side of such reforms as were outlined by the Speaker's Conference, the only result of bringing in such a measure as Mr. Salter proposed would be to have the majority in opposition to its limits, instead of in favour of its provisions.

On the question of votes for women, I reminded the House that I had always supported this, and that the heroic patriotism of the women workers during the War had now made their claim irresistible. Further, the domestic problems which would have to be faced after the War would intimately concern them, and to exclude them from a voice in choosing the parliament that would deal with these issues would be an outrage.

I admitted that the question of Proportional Representation was in a different category. It was not an integral part of the reform of the franchise or of redistribution. Whether it should form a part of the whole scheme was for the House to say. The other measures need not stand or fall by their verdict on it.



After a full debate, Mr. Asquith's motion was adopted by 341 votes to 62. Thus by a most emphatic majority we were encouraged to put our hands to this very important constitutional reform.

It is hardly necessary here to recapitulate the long debates and controversies to which the new Reform Bill gave rise. It was brought in under the title of the Representation of the People Bill, and passed its second reading on 23rd May, 1917, by 329 votes to 40. Discussion in Committee lasted nearly until the end of the year. The clause according the vote to women was carried by a seven-to-one majority, but Proportional Representation was struck out of the Bill, and the Alternative Vote in single-member seats was carried by a majority of one. The third reading was passed on 7th December, 1917, and the Bill went to the House of Lords.

There the chief conflict centred round the issue of Proportional Representation, which their noble Lordships wished to insert in the Bill. With the Alternative Vote they would have nothing to do. For a few days the Bill became a shuttlecock between the two Houses, till a stage was reached where the Commons were being called on to consider the Lords' Amendments to Commons' Amendments to Lords' Amendments to Commons' Amendments to Lords' Amendments to the Bill. By that time the Lords had finally squashed the suggestion of the Alternative Vote, and in regard to Proportional Representation were contenting themselves with insisting that the Boundary Commissioners under the Act should prepare a scheme for a limited experiment of P.R. in 100 constituencies, which should come into force if adopted by both Houses of Parliament. Pleading with the Commons to accept this compromise, Mr. Bonar Law, that sometimes disconcertingly candid Conservative, said:—

"Any Second Chamber, at all events the House of Lords, is naturally a Conservative institution. We admit that. We agree also, I think, that except in time of war, and the unity with which Parties were acting, it would have been utterly impossible to get the Second Chamber to adopt this Bill at all. It could only have been done after a big Party conflict, in which the whole feeling of the country was roused against the House of Lords. In no other way could it have been done. . . . I do not believe that the country cares twopence one way or the other about either proportional representation or even the alternative vote, but I do say that the country does care about the passing of this Bill. . . . If the Bill fails to go through now it will produce a feeling in the country which I am afraid to contemplate."

This was a striking admission. The leader of the Tory Party acknowledged that the country profoundly desired the Bill, and at the same time owned that in ordinary times nothing but a desperate

conflict in which the whole country was roused against the House of Lords would have availed to carry it.

In the heart of a cyclone there is a patch of calm. It is with some satisfaction that I can recall how we took advantage of that vortex of domestic peace to carry through this great progressive measure. It was by far the biggest advance since the Reform Bill of 1832, and in some respects was even more revolutionary. It redistributed seats on a uniform basis throughout the kingdom. It reduced plural voting to its lowest limits. It gave manhood suffrage, and most revolutionary of all, it opened the doors of the polling-booth to women for parliamentary elections. It increased the total electorate from about 8,350,000 (all males) to over 20,000,000, including about as many women as the total electorate prior to the Bill. It provided an efficient system of registration, and various provisions for checking extravagance and corruption at elections. We had long called ourselves a democratic country. Not until this measure was passed into law could it be truly said that our parliamentary representation was elected on a really democratic basis.

## CHAPTER LXI

### THE AUSTRIAN PEACE MOVE

Now we come to an episode which furnishes a new illustration of an old historical fact that, where you are working with allies, it is just as difficult to negotiate an honourable peace as to wage successful war. Personal and national susceptibilities and jealousies cloud judgment and impede united action in both cases.

As the Great War dragged on through its third year, the strain came to be felt acutely in a number of ways by Austria-Hungary. The Dual Monarchy had with difficulty been held together in peace, and was very ill-adapted to resist the stress of prolonged hostilities. I once characterised it as "the ramshackle Empire," and the event of the War proved how apt was the description.

While the aged Emperor Francis Joseph lived, the anxieties of the Austrian Government could not become vocal in any appeal that hinted at concessions to the enemy. Dyed deep in the purple traditions of his Imperial pride, he upheld that pride of Empire with his last breath—his own and that of myriads of his devoted subjects. During the last year of his reign he was too feeble in mind and body to be told the truth as to the state of his country. But on 21st November, 1916, he breathed his last, and was succeeded by the Archduke Karl, who was his heir by virtue of a succession of tragedies that had one by one removed those nearer to the throne. Karl was of a liberal and pacific disposition. The Empress Zita was a Bourbon. She had no love for Prussia and certainly no hatred of France. She possessed a strong personality and her influence over an amiable and amenable husband was considerable. She saw only too clearly the dangers to the Hapsburg dynasty of a further prolongation of the War. Personal devotion to a monarch who had become a legendary figure to his people kept together an assembly of antagonistic races in a semblance of Imperial unity. Karl possessed no personal attribute nor had he acquired any popular affection that would prevent the rival tribes of his Empire from falling away from his throne or even fighting each other. The Empress was more acutely alive to this fact than the Emperor, and she disliked the idea of risking her husband's throne and that of her son for the doubtful chance of humbling France and exalting the Prussian Kaiser.



It was no enviable heritage to which Karl succeeded. The Austrian Empire was being dragged along remorselessly by its dominant partner in a ruinous struggle, the end of which was not in sight. The military party in Germany had vast ambitions of territorial aggrandisement which they still cherished some hope of achieving through the War, but their success would almost certainly lead to the subordination of Austria to Prussian overlordship. Once or twice already Austrians had been saved from disaster by the timely assistance of the German Army. If the Central Powers were ultimately victorious, Austria might expect to become, for all practical purposes, a vassal of Germany. During the War, she could not hold her frontiers without German help. After the War, she could not hope to keep her unruly subjects together without the same powerful aid. If the Central Powers were defeated, inevitable ruin, revolution and a break-up awaited the Empire of the Hapsburgs. It is not surprising that Karl and his intelligent consort looked out longingly for an early peace without victory or defeat, which might give him some prospect of holding together the shaky Empire over which fate had enthroned him.

His first act on succeeding to the Crown was to publish an address to his peoples in which he declared:—

“I desire to do all in my power to end, as soon as may be, the horrors and the sacrifices of the War, and to restore to my Peoples the vanished blessings of Peace, so soon as the honour of my Arms, the vital interests of my States and their faithful Allies, and the malignity of my Enemies will allow.”

This declaration was in marked contrast to the tone of the German Peace Note, issued three weeks later. It sounded no note of bombast and triumph, and hinted nothing of a purpose of annexations or other war gains. It was the utterance of one who wished himself safely out of the War, on any terms he could honourably accept.

In the following months, persistent rumours gained currency that Austria was on the look-out for an opportunity to make a separate peace with the Entente. Although Austrian statesmen had been primarily responsible for plunging Europe into the carnage of a World War, there was no feeling of antipathy towards Austria, either in Britain or in France. Germany was regarded as the real culprit. This was not altogether a just appreciation of the origin of the War. But it would be fair to say that, without the guaranteed support of Germany, Austria would not have struck the blow that precipitated universal war. British and Austrian swords had never clashed, and British and Austrian interests had not hitherto come into conflict in any part of the globe. And although French and Austrian soldiers had fought against each other on many a famous battlefield, still there

was no feeling of rooted hostility on either side. They had in recent times been equally the victims of Prussian militarism. That gave them a certain comradeship in misfortune. The aged Austrian Kaiser was regarded as a genial and well-meaning potentate who wished to end his days in peace with all mankind. The names of Austrian statesmen conveyed no significance to the general public outside Austria. The French view of the origin of the war was that Germany engineered it, and when the suitable moment arrived put the pistol in the hands of the venerable Emperor and urged him to pull the trigger that not only gave the signal, but fired the powder magazine of Europe. At any time, therefore, when Austria was prepared to restore Serbian independence and emancipate its Italian population, Britain and France would only too gladly make peace and shake hands with the Hapsburgs.

In January, 1917, a story reached Sir M. Findlay, the British Minister at Christiania (now Oslo), to the effect that Austria was anxious to feel her way to peace negotiation. Baron Franz, who had been Austrian Chargé d'Affaires at Copenhagen, and was still attached to the Legation, was said to have discussed the matter with the King of Norway, and there were certain persons in Copenhagen who declared themselves to be instructed to make arrangements for a diplomatic talk, strictly secret, about the possibility of peace with Austria. Sir M. Findlay informed our Foreign Office in a series of telegrams about these reports, and it sounded serious enough for us to decide to send Sir Francis Hopwood (now Lord Southborough) to Scandinavia on 1st February, 1917, to investigate the story. Sir Francis visited Christiania, Copenhagen and Stockholm, and had several meetings with the alleged agents of Austria, but they failed to arrange a meeting between him and any authorised Austrian diplomats. Count Mensdorff was the last Ambassador of the Austrian Empire in London. His attractive personality and his obvious friendliness towards Britain made him a popular figure in political and social circles in London. The break with Britain filled him with genuine sadness; but he did not possess sufficient influence in Vienna to modify the wild counsels of the Austrian Foreign Office. Count Mensdorff visited Scandinavia at this time. It is not clear why he went there at this juncture. At any rate he and Sir Francis Hopwood did not meet. The "agents" suggested that the Austrian peace move must have been squashed by the Kaiser, who had just been paying a visit to Vienna, and that the Mensdorff mission was countermanded. Probably, however, the Austrian Emperor had decided against attempting to open negotiations via Scandinavia, preferring to make use of his brother-in-law, Prince Sixte. Hopwood had an audience on 6th March, 1917, with the King of Norway, who told him that Count Mensdorff, "who was *triste*, very worried and much fatter," had discussed with him the desire of Austria for peace, and had hinted

at proposals. He had said, however, that the Austrian Government was deeply disappointed with the Allies' reply to the German Peace Note, especially with that part of it dealing with the rights of small states and various nationalities. Count Mensdorff had pointed out that Austria was made up of small nationalities and of various races, and said that the Austrians had read the Note as an incitement to their people to rebel and bring about the break-up of the Austrian Empire. This is an indication of the practical difficulties which stood in the way of making peace with Austria. It could only have been achieved at that time by perpetuating the subjection of four-fifths of the population of the Hapsburg Empire to the Teutonic yoke.

Sir Francis Hopwood was thus forced to return without making any direct contact with Austrian diplomats, or even securing incontrovertible evidence that a peace move was being sought from that quarter. But although his mission was nugatory, I felt we ought not to neglect any opportunity which seemed to offer itself for detaching any of our enemies from the powerful combination we were fighting.

We were shortly to learn through another channel that the Emperor Karl was sincerely desirous to open negotiations with the Allies.

Prince Sixte of Bourbon, the son of the Duke of Parma and brother of the Empress Zita of Austria, was a member of the former Royal House of France, and for ten years before the War he had been settled in Paris, and regarded himself as a Frenchman. Such was the prejudice in France against the Royalist connection that when war broke out Prince Sixte found himself unable to join the French Army; but through the intervention of his cousin, the Queen of the Belgians, he and his brother found work with the Belgian Army, at first in the Red Cross, afterwards in the artillery.

Princess Zita had married the Archduke Karl of Austria at a time when there seemed no prospect of his becoming the heir to the Austrian throne. But the Sarajevo outrage unexpectedly left Karl heir-presumptive to Francis Joseph; and when at the end of 1916 he found himself perched precariously on the tottering throne of the Dual Monarchy, and looked round for some really trustworthy friend whom he could use to conduct secret negotiations with the Entente Powers, Karl naturally bethought himself of his brother-in-law.

A meeting was arranged in the first instance between Prince Sixte and his mother, the Duchess of Parma, who was with her daughter in Vienna. The meeting took place in Switzerland on 29th January, 1917. Very little appears to have passed then beyond a letter to Sixte from his sister, endorsed with a few lines from Karl, pleading that he would help them to make peace. Sixte told his mother the lines on which he thought any peace acceptable to France would have to run, and she brought this information back to her son-in-law.

On 13th February, 1917, Prince Sixte was again in Switzerland, to meet an envoy accredited from Karl, who told him that the Emperor



was most anxious for peace, and would be prepared to consider it upon the following terms:—

- (1) A secret armistice with Russia in which the question of Constantinople would not be made an issue;
- (2) Alsace-Lorraine and
- (3) Belgium to be restored;
- (4) The formation of a Southern Slav Monarchy, embracing Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania and Montenegro.

It is well to note that Italy is altogether ignored. The Emperor evidently contemplated a peace in which her claims were brushed aside, and to which therefore she would be no party. This attitude was maintained throughout the subsequent negotiations and was largely responsible for their failure.

Prince Sixte told the envoy that such a peace could not be negotiated openly, as both Germany and Italy would oppose it. If Karl wanted to make it secretly, he must send along some document which Sixte could pass to the French Government as a basis for diplomatic negotiations.

On 21st February, the envoy reappeared, bringing a minute that had been drawn up by Count Czernin, who had recently been appointed Foreign Minister by the Emperor Karl; and a secret and personal message written by Karl himself.

The note drawn up by Count Czernin was of a very unaccommodating nature, and would not by itself have served in the smallest degree to promote an early peace move. It was to the following effect:—

“(1) The Alliance between Austria-Hungary, Germany, Turkey and Bulgaria is absolutely indissoluble, and the conclusion of a separate Peace by any of these States is permanently barred.

(2) Austria-Hungary has never contemplated the destruction of Serbia. It is, however, necessary for her to be on guard in every possible way against the recurrence of such political activities as led to the outrage of Sarajevo. Otherwise, Austria-Hungary intends to renew her friendly relations with Serbia and to cement them by liberal economic concessions.

(3) Should Germany consent to relinquish Alsace-Lorraine, Austria-Hungary would, naturally, make no opposition.

(4) Belgium should be restored and should receive compensation *from all the belligerents*.

(5) It is quite wrong to suppose that Austria-Hungary is politically subordinated to Germany; on the other hand, it is commonly believed in Austria-Hungary that France is completely under the influence of England.

(6) Similarly, Austria-Hungary has no idea of annihilating Roumania. She is, however, bound to retain that country as a

pawn until she has obtained guarantees of the absolute integrity of the Monarchy.

(7) Austria-Hungary has publicly announced that she is at war in self-defence only, and that her object will have been achieved as soon as she is assured of the free development of the Monarchy.

(8) In Austria-Hungary there is no difference of privileges between the various subject races. The Slavs will ever enjoy the same rights as the Germans. Foreign nations have misinterpreted the feeling among the Slavs, who are actually most loyal to their Emperor and Empire."

The first paragraph of this memorandum seemed to bang the door against any hope of concluding a separate peace with Austria-Hungary. Its intention was, however, probably to protect the negotiators in case Germany should get wind of what was going on. They could also fall back on it if they found cause to suspect that the Entente were trying to use the negotiations not to make a genuine peace, but merely to split up the Central Powers.

The concluding paragraph was clearly intended as a retort to the remarks about the freedom and independence of small nations which had figured in the reply of the Entente Powers to President Wilson's Peace Note. Karl's notion of a Southern Slav kingdom was thrown over. As to Belgium, she was to be compensated out of a fund to which we were all to contribute.

The tone as well as the terms of Czernin's Memorandum would not have evoked on the Allied side any desire for further negotiations. A short personal note from the Emperor Karl, by which it was accompanied, contained comments on Czernin's propositions intended to be of a more friendly character, although it did not advance matters much further. It ran as follows:—

"Secret—

To (3): We will support France, and bring pressure to bear on Germany with all our means.

To (4): We have the greatest sympathy for Belgium, and know that she has been unjustly treated. *The Entente and ourselves* will make good her serious injuries.

To (5): We are entirely uncontrolled by Germany, and indeed *against Germany's will* we have not broken off relations with America. We have the idea that France is completely under the influence of England.

To (7): Germany too [is at war for self-defence].

To (8): Among us there are no special privileges for particular races. The Slavs have full equality of rights. All races are united and loyal to the Dynasty.

— *Our sole object is to maintain the Monarchy in its present dimensions."*

The suggestion in Czernin's fifth paragraph, and Karl's repetition of it in his note, that France was dominated by England, was an effort, though not a very subtle one, to engender distrust and dissension among the Allies, and rouse the pride of the French to assert and demonstrate their independence by giving favourable consideration to the Austrian proposals. It is clear that at this stage Austria hoped not so much for a separate peace as for an understanding with France about peace terms which might prove a lever to force general peace negotiations. It was an effort to detach France from the Alliance.

On 5th March, 1917, Prince Sixte laid these memoranda before President Poincaré. The President was not favourably impressed by Czernin's note, but saw in that of Karl a prospect of a basis for negotiations. He consulted with Briand, who agreed that the first step before approaching the Allies was to get a more explicit statement from Karl as to the terms he would make with France, Belgium, Russia and Serbia, and that then the allies of France could be cautiously informed as to what was on foot. Arrangements about Italy and Roumania could be left over for the moment. Both Poincaré and Briand were clear that only a separate peace with Austria alone should be considered, as there was no prospect of Germany at this stage consenting to any terms the Entente could accept.

Prince Sixte wrote at length to Karl, telling him of the reception by the French Government of his messages, and of the attitude they had taken up. He urged the Emperor to make a definite offer of peace in terms of the four main points that had been raised:—

1. Restoration and independence of Belgium;
2. Re-establishment of France's Eastern frontier at the line of 1814 (i.e. including Alsace-Lorraine and the Saar);
3. Restoration and independence of Serbia;
4. Russia's right to obtain Constantinople.

The claims of Italy were not being pressed by France at this stage.

The outcome of this was that Prince Sixte and his younger brother, Prince Xavier, paid a secret visit to Vienna, which they reached on 22nd March, 1917, and on 24th March, had an interview with the Emperor Karl in his castle of Laxenburg, a few miles from the capital. Prince Sixte's account of this interview casts a sinister light on the German Peace Note and proves that the Allies had correctly interpreted it. He states that the Emperor told the brothers that he thought it essential to make peace without delay. He had tried without success to induce his German allies to agree to a peace of accommodation; but "*they were bent on exacting the terms of a peace of victory.*" If he (Karl) were finally unsuccessful in persuading them to accept just and equitable terms, he would be prepared to make a separate peace, rather than sacrifice the Dual Monarchy to Prussian ambitions.



The terms of a possible peace were discussed, and Karl showed himself quite willing to meet French wishes in regard to their Eastern frontier, and the demilitarisation of the left bank of the Rhine. He also approved the restoration of Belgium. As to Serbia, the one point which stuck in his throat was the secret pan-Serbian societies which had before the War been a constant source of anxiety and danger to the Government. If these were really suppressed, and Serbia would firmly discountenance any future efforts to foster revolutionary or irredentist movements in the Slav provinces of Austria-Hungary, he would be willing to restore Serbian independence and give her the Albanian coast as an outlet to the sea. As regards Russia, the revolution there had made Russia's future war effort and war aims problematical, and he was inclined to say nothing definite about Constantinople. But the cynical selfishness which has thwarted every effort to establish world peace on just and therefore firm foundations was displayed in Karl's approach to the Allies. Whilst he showed the greatest readiness to give up Germany's conquests from 1870 to 1917 he was more reluctant to consent to surrender Austrian annexations of Italian territory. He was most unwilling to make any concessions to Italy. The young Emperor felt bitterly about Italy's action in breaking away from the Triple Alliance and joining with Austria's enemies, and he despised the Italians for their inability to capture from his numerically inferior Army the Trentino and the coast-line to Trieste, to which they laid claim. He told his brother-in-law that while the main forces of Austria had been engaged against Russia and Serbia, a few territorial battalions and his "gallant Tyrolese" had sufficed to hold all Italy at bay along what had been originally designed in the Austrian plan of campaign as only an extreme line of outposts. Why should he, in the teeth of the strong anti-Italian feeling among his people, hand over to Italy a piece of Austrian territory which the Italians showed themselves quite unable to take?

This kind of talk was not very helpful. In view of the treaty under which Italy entered the War, we could not have deserted her now without being guilty of the greatest perfidy.

From his interviews with the Emperor, Prince Sixte returned to France, bearing with him an autograph letter written by Karl, which ran as follows:—

"Laxenburg,  
24th March, 1917.

My dear Sixte,

The third anniversary of a war which has plunged the world in mourning is now drawing near. All the peoples of my Empire are united more firmly than ever in the determination to preserve the integrity of the Monarchy, even at the cost of the greatest sacrifices. By virtue of their unity, of the generous collaboration of all the

ances of my Empire, we have been able to hold out for nearly three years, against the most serious assaults. No one can deny the military achievements won by my troops, especially in the Balkan theatre of war.

France, too, has shown a strength of resistance and a vigour which are magnificent. We all admire without reservation the fine traditional gallantry of her Army and the spirit of self-devotion of the French people.

And therefore do I note with special pleasure that although for the time being we are opponents, no real divergence of views or of aspirations separates my Empire from France, and that I am justified in hoping that my own lively sympathy with France, added to that which prevails throughout the Monarchy, will prevent the recurrence at any future time of a state of war for which the responsibility cannot be laid at my door. To this end, and in order to set out in a precise manner the reality of these sentiments, I request you to convey secretly to M. Poincaré, the President of the French Republic, the information that by every means and by the exercise of all my personal influence with my allies, I will support the just claims of France in regard to Alsace-Lorraine.

As for Belgium, she must be fully re-established in her sovereignty, retaining the whole of her African possessions, without prejudice to the compensations she may receive for the losses she has sustained.

As for Serbia, she will be re-established in her sovereignty, and as a token of our good will we are willing to grant her a just and natural access to the Adriatic Sea, as well as liberal economic concessions.

In return, Austria-Hungary requires as a primordial and absolute condition, that the Kingdom of Serbia shall for the future abandon all connection with and shall suppress every society or federation of which the political object is the disintegration of the Monarchy, and particularly the 'Narodna Obrana'; that loyally and by all the means in her power she shall suppress every kind of political agitation, whether in Serbia or beyond her frontiers, that has this character, and that she shall give us an assurance to this effect, guaranteed by the Entente Powers.

The events which have taken place in Russia compel me to withhold my ideas in regard to her until a legal and compact Government shall have been established there.

Now that I have set forth my ideas for you, I will ask you to set out for me, in your turn, after having discussed them with those two Powers, the opinions in the first place of France and England, so that a basis for agreement may thus be prepared, on the foundation of which official negotiations can be undertaken and concluded to the satisfaction of all parties.

Hoping that we may thus be able soon to bring to an end the sufferings of so many millions of men and of their families, that now are in sorrow and anxiety, I beg you to be assured of my fraternal affection.

CHARLES."

Germany was to restore the independence of Belgium and to give Alsace back to France, Serbia was to be bribed at the expense of Albania, but not a word about Italy. Austria was to concede nothing in return for a peace her sovereign ardently desired.

Prince Sixte reached Paris with this letter on 30th March, 1917, and on the 31st he had a further interview with M. Poincaré, at which M. Cambon was present in the unavoidable absence of M. Ribot (Briand by this date had resigned and been succeeded by M. Ribot), and the Emperor's letter was laid before them. They were favourably impressed with its contents.

After some discussion, both Poincaré and Cambon were in favour of Prince Sixte proceeding to England and informing King George and myself of the proposals made by the Austrian Emperor. But in this they were reckoning without M. Ribot, who on learning later in the day what had taken place, insisted that he must himself play the part of the channel of communication with the British Government. He sent word to Sixte that he was inviting me to meet him in a few days' time at Boulogne, that he would inform me under a strict pledge of secrecy about the Emperor's letter, and make preliminary arrangements with me for the Prince to visit King George and inform him about Karl's proposals.

The matter of secrecy was vital at this time. For Karl had a well-founded fear that if it should get to the ears of the German Government that he was trying to negotiate a separate peace behind their backs, they would promptly take steps to render this impossible, by ordering him either to send Austrian troops to the Western Front, or to enter on an offensive against Italy, or otherwise destroy the atmosphere in which peace could be negotiated with the Entente; and even his life would be in grave danger. The fate of the heir to the Turkish throne, Prince Youssouf Yzzedin, was a significant object lesson of the peril anyone ran who proved himself inconvenient to the German authorities. It was perfectly obvious that any peace move carried through Austria would necessarily be a separate peace involving the abandonment of her alliance with Germany. No peace was possible between the Entente and the Prussian military clique that dominated Germany, until one side or the other was decisively defeated. Germany would therefore regard an Austrian peace as a gross betrayal and was likely to go to any length to avoid or avenge a desertion which would isolate her and trap her in a corner.

Actually M. Ribot's preoccupations as newly-appointed Premier



kept him from meeting me until the 11th April, when we met by arrangement at Folkestone and he showed me the Emperor's letter under a strict pledge of secrecy. I have before me as I write the pencilled copy of the original French text which I made with my own hand at the time, on which I endorsed the fact that it had been handed to the President on 31st March, 1917. With it is a further pencilled note of the principal points which emerged in my discussion with M. Ribot about the offer. This runs as follows:—

“Wants separate peace.

Allies can prosecute War against Germany alone to complete victory.

Alsace-Lorraine

French Revolutionary Boundary—and get reparation, indemnity and guarantees on left bank of Rhine.

Suggests Cilicia for Italy instead of Trentino.”

I considered that we ought to proceed with the negotiations but that we must avoid every appearance of a breach of faith with the Italians and must therefore carry them along with us. M. Ribot was however insistent that we should preserve complete secrecy about the Emperor's move. This, in his opinion, was rendered more difficult if another party were brought into the negotiations. I realised that it would add to our difficulty in preserving the secrecy which was essential to success in such confidential negotiations. But I urged that we must do our best to sound Baron Sonnino without betraying the Emperor's confidence, and we agreed that we should arrange a meeting with the Italian Premier and Foreign Minister at an early date to talk the matter over in so far as we could within this embarrassing restriction.

Next day, Prince Sixte had an interview with Poincaré and Ribot, and heard the result of the Folkestone meeting. He was gravely alarmed at the suggestion of telling Sonnino about the Emperor's letter, as he feared an indiscretion on the part of the Italian Government, which would assuredly have disastrous consequences for Karl. But his deepest apprehension arose rather from the fear that if Italy were brought into the negotiations the Austrian Emperor could not obtain the consent of his people to satisfying Italian demands, and that the negotiations would therefore fail. There was a feeling of real hostility on the part of the Austrian ruling classes towards Italy. The fact that Italy was accused of betraying the Triple Alliance and taking advantage of her ally's difficulties in order to annex her territory, created an exasperation towards Italy which would make a separate peace with her almost impossible. It was for this reason that the Emperor's letter offered the Italians nothing in the deal. On the other hand, once the Italians realised that Austria was not contemplating

any territorial concession to them they would deliberately give away the secret of these separate talks to Germany, in order to put an end to conversations which might leave Italy in the lurch. Sonnino himself was trustworthy, but this could not be said for some of his colleagues, and he might feel himself bound to tell them about the matter. M. Poincaré was of the Prince's way of thinking, as were the two Cambons, Jules and Paul. M. Ribot also reluctantly agreed that it would on the whole be better for the moment to withhold information from Italy about the letter when sounding them about their views on a peace with Austria. I regretted the decision, but as the letter was sent to the French President and it had been communicated to me under conditions of strict secrecy, I felt I had no right to go beyond urging the French to persuade Prince Sixte to permit us to deal frankly with Sonnino. This he could not see his way to allow.

A conference of the French and British Premiers with Baron Sonnino was arranged for 19th April, at St. Jean de Maurienne. Prince Sixte, who had intended to visit England, decided to wait and meet me on my way through Paris. This meeting took place on Wednesday, 18th April, 1917, immediately on my arrival in Paris. We had an extended discussion about the possibility of a separate peace with Austria, and I stressed the point that it would be essential to come to an agreement with Italy about the terms of any settlement it was proposed to make. I urged the Prince to allow us to state the position fully to the Italian Premier and Foreign Minister. I told him that he could safely trust the secret to both Sonnino and Boselli, the Italian Premier, but he was unwilling to increase the burden of personal responsibility which he was carrying by this extension of the circle to which the peace move was known, and I gave him my promise to respect his wishes. He told me that Ribot proposed to raise the matter with the Italians at the conference by referring to recent statements of Count Czernin about Austria's wish for peace, which had been quoted in Italian newspapers. I suggested that it would be even better to base the discussion upon Count Mensdorff's manœuvres in Switzerland, where I had information that he was putting about a good deal of peace talk, and the Prince warmly supported this idea.

On leaving me, the Prince wrote the following letter to William Martin, the official at the Quai d'Orsay who had arranged the interview:—

“Paris,  
18th April, 1917.

Monsieur le Ministre,

I am most deeply indebted to you for having overcome all difficulties and brought about a meeting between Mr. Lloyd George and myself. The interview went off perfectly, and must

be of great value. Mr. Lloyd George expressed a great anxiety to see me again next Friday, on his way home. I asked him to apply to you to let me know at what hour I should call upon him. You see, I am still reckoning upon your unfailing good nature and upon your friendship for myself both for this, and also to arrange for me interviews with M. Ribot before and after my interview with Mr. Lloyd George.

Believe me, Monsieur le Ministre, yours most gratefully and affectionately,

SIXTE DE BOURBON."

Next day M. Ribot and I met the Italian Premier and Foreign Minister at St. Jean de Maurienne. The Alpine snows had not yet melted in the valley. The conference took place in a railway carriage, drawn up beside the station. The chief subjects for discussion, forming the ostensible object of the conference, were Italy's aspirations in Asia Minor, and the question of Greece. When these had been dealt with, we proceeded to talk about the prospects of an early peace with Austria, basing this upon the rumours which had reached us from various sources that the Dual Monarchy was contemplating some move of this nature. The minute taken of our discussion notes that there was some conversation on the subject of the recent indications of Austria's desire for a separate peace with the Allies. I pointed out that the British Admiralty had absolutely no doubt that from a naval point of view the elimination of Austria would be a very decided advantage to the Allies. Provided that Austria made a separate peace with all the Allies, and not with Russia only, the British military authorities were also agreed that the military advantages to the Allies would be very considerable. I pointed out, however, that the conclusion of a separate peace between Austria and Russia would probably not be advantageous from a military point of view, but that it was Italy mainly that would be affected, since large Austrian forces would then become available for concentration against Italy. This was far more probable than that Austrian troops would be employed on the Western Front.

Baron Sonnino did not like the idea of any separate peace with Austria. He conceived that the Central Powers were endeavouring to entangle the Allies in peace negotiations. It would, he said, be very difficult to induce public opinion in Italy to carry on the War if peace were once made with Austria, and he did not respond at all to my suggestion that if Austria were eliminated Italy could then employ her strength in the realisation of her *desiderata* in Turkey. On the whole, therefore, Baron Sonnino thought it would be advisable for the Allies not to listen to any suggestions for a separate peace, all of which, he believed, were aimed at dividing them one from the other, and endeavouring to represent first one of the Allies and then another as standing in the way of peace.



Sonnino was mainly responsible for bringing Italy into the War on the side of the Allies. We therefore attached great importance to his views. We saw no prospect of inducing Austria to part with the territory for the redemption of which Italy had entered the War and borne such heavy losses. The Emperor Karl was reluctant to make any concession to Italy. Baron Sonnino's natural resistance in those circumstances was for the time fatal to any further progress with the negotiations.

Eventually the following formula was adopted on M. Ribot's initiative:—

“Mr. Lloyd George, M. Ribot and Baron Sonnino had a discussion about the approaches which Austria might be inclined to make to one or more of the Allied Powers with a view to securing a separate peace.

They reached an agreement that it would not be opportune to enter on a conversation which, in present circumstances, would be particularly dangerous and would risk weakening the close unity that exists between the Allies and is more than ever necessary.”

Would M. Ribot and I have succeeded any better had we revealed to Baron Sonnino the whole of the facts? I doubt it. The reading of the Emperor's letter, in which Italy was not even mentioned, would have exasperated him. He was a hot-tempered man and once irritated he was not easily soothed. A few hours in a snow-laden valley would not have chilled his anger. Apart from that, Austria was not in the least ready to make concessions which the most reasonable Italian statesman would have accepted.

Bülow induced Austria to offer certain territorial concessions to buy Italy's neutrality before she came into the War. Sonnino had persuaded his colleagues to reject these offers and to fight for more. He could not have accepted the same terms after the heavy casualties which Italy had incurred.

The fact was that Baron Sonnino had vast ambitions for Italy, which he hoped to see realised as a result of the combined effort of all the Allies. He knew that Britain and France would fight to the end against Germany, and that America was now committed to support them in the conflict. A peace with Austria at this stage must necessarily be a compromise, out of which Italy would not have secured much. Sonnino was convinced of the ultimate victory of the Allies. He was therefore loth to contemplate a separate peace with Austria unless he could be assured that it would secure to Italy all the gains she might hope to receive through complete victory—the Trentino, Trieste, Dalmatia, and all the islands in the Adriatic. A peace that did not secure these, he assured us, would result in a revolution in Italy. Baron Sonnino declared that Italy had been actuated in entering the War by her passion to reclaim the *terra*

*irredenta*, and that she could not possibly make peace terms with Austria in which these war aims were not realised. He declared that no Government could remain in office a day in Italy which proposed a peace without attaining these objectives. The people would sweep it away, would rise in revolution, banish their King and set up a Republic on the basis of a fight to a finish. Satisfactory terms could not be obtained at this stage when the Central Powers were still winning great victories. Britain and France could not honourably throw over an ally which had come into action on our side at a critical stage in the War. That is why we concluded that nothing more could be done with the Emperor's letter.

We discovered subsequently that the Italian General Headquarters had sent an emissary, a week before our meeting at St. Jean de Maurienne, to offer to the German and Austrian Ministers in Switzerland a peace with Italy on the sole condition of the cession of the Trentino—neither Dalmatia, nor Trieste, nor even Gorizia being demanded. And although the offer was unknown to Sonnino, it was definitely stated by the Emperor Karl in a communication sent through his envoy to Prince Sixte, that Giolitti and Tittoni approved it and that the offer came from the King of Italy.

This attempt to make a secret peace with Austria was inspired by Cadorna's fear that the Italian Army had grown war-weary, and that the Italian people, who had never been as enthusiastic as their allies about the War, were on the brink of a revolution. A few months later, part of his apprehensions were justified by the collapse at Caporetto. But at St. Jean de Maurienne we knew nothing of the doubts felt in the highest military circles in Italy as to the morale of some of the troops. The unyielding spirit of Sonnino had no misgivings and the Italian peace seekers had not deemed it prudent to take him into their confidence.

On the following day, 20th April, 1917, I met Prince Sixte again in Paris on my way back from the Conference. I told him of the difficulties we had experienced with Italy, made the greater by our inability to tell Sonnino that we really had a definite offer to consider. "We have utilised the statements of Count Mensdorff and such information as we could get through other channels," I told him, "but it has not been easy."

I told the Prince that my impression was that Sonnino would insist on the Trentino, Dalmatia and the coastal islands of the Adriatic as his minimum demands for peace with Austria. Trieste might be a subject for negotiation, but unless something substantial on these lines were offered to Italy, she would hold out against peace, and as we were bound to Italy by our Alliance we could not make peace without her.

The Prince replied that there was little prospect of Austria making such concessions to Italy unless she very desperately wished for peace,

and that Italy's war achievements to date could hardly be said to warrant Austria conceding to her the spoils of victory. I pointed out to him that we were now in the position, with America's backing, of being able to carry on indefinitely till we won a victory that would enable us to dictate terms, and if Austria refused to make an offer now that would placate Italy, she might have to pay more dearly still at a later stage. I said that I still hoped that these considerations would weigh with the Emperor.

On 22nd April, M. Jules Cambon saw the Prince. The latter gives the following summary of the interview:—

" M. Jules Cambon told me that he had been instructed to give me the French Government's reply to the Emperor's letter. He first of all assured me that the secret had been kept from Italy by M. Ribot and Mr. Lloyd George alike. The latter, he said, was particularly careful in this respect. In view of the importance of transmitting the reply accurately, I asked him if I might take it down, and he dictated to me, as follows:—

' No overtures of peace from Austria can be considered without an equal consideration of the views of the Italian Government. Now, the proposals which have been submitted to us totally ignore the claims of Italy, while we have ascertained from the conversations which took place at St. Jean de Maurienne that the Italian Government is not disposed to abandon any of the conditions upon which it came into the War. This being so, there is no good in our carrying on negotiations which can only end in a deadlock. If, at a given moment and in altered circumstances, the Austrian Government were to consider that fresh efforts might well be made to secure a separate peace, Austria must then take into account the aspirations of Italy, which cover Trieste as well as the Trentino. We have greatly appreciated the feeling of sympathy for France and her allies which the Emperor has shown.' "

Prince Sixte wrote at once to the Emperor, sending him this reply of the French Government, and urging him to keep open the degree of understanding he had reached with France and England as a basis for a further advance towards peace. This letter he took to Switzerland and delivered to Karl's emissary, Count Erdödy, giving him at the same time a verbal account of the course the discussions had taken.

On 4th May, 1917, the Count rejoined Prince Sixte in Neuchâtel, bringing him letters from the Emperor and Empress, urging him to visit them again at Vienna, as there were points about which they were not yet clear. He also brought a verbal message from Karl, stating categorically that he was prepared to negotiate a separate



peace with the Entente, provided that he would not thereby be required to join in attacking Germany.

As regards the prospects of peace, the message informed Prince Sixte that Austria had already received five peace offers, mainly from Russia. But they included the one from Italy, three weeks before, in which nothing was demanded beyond the Italian-speaking portion of the Tyrol. That offer the Emperor had refused, as he did not want to be engaged in two separate negotiations at once. "Consequently Italy is now looking to gain further advantages by way of England, which is impossible. The Emperor is quite well able to defeat Italy, but why kill another hundred thousand men? Far better to make peace."

The Prince decided to accept the invitation to visit Vienna. Meantime he sent back to Paris the officer who had accompanied him as his travelling companion, entrusting to him an account of the verbal message he had received through Count Erdödy. This was passed over on 9th May to Poincaré and Ribot, and the latter wrote to me on 12th May, sending me a copy of the statement. M. Ribot's letter was as follows:—

"Paris,

12th May, 1917.

Dear Mr. Lloyd George,

I am anxious that you should not be left in ignorance of any of the conversations which may take place between the people you know of, in regard to the intentions that Austria-Hungary might have of making a separate peace.

In this connection, I am sending you a note summarising the declarations made three days ago, to a very reliable person. You will observe what is said in this note about the steps which Italy has taken with a view to making terms. It seems most unlikely that any request of this order could have been made, without at least the tacit authorisation of some responsible person. However that may be, the document which I am sending you is not without interest for the indications that it gives as to the state of mind of the Emperor, and of the resolve already formed to relinquish the Trentino to Italy.

Believe me,

A. RIBOT."

To this covering letter was attached a document dated 9th May, 1917, containing the message brought to Prince Sixte verbally by Count Erdödy. It ran:—

"Prince S. having written on 24th April to his brother-in-law that the English and French Governments could not make peace without Italy, and having intimated to him that, in the view of

Mr. Lloyd George, the essential requirements of this Power would be the Italian-speaking Trentino and the Dalmatian Islands,\* the Emperor replied to him that there was something in his letter which was not clear. A letter from the Empress indicated that this lack of clarity arose in regard to the attitude of Italy.

In the course of a conversation which took place on 4th May, Count E. explained that, as a matter of fact, peace had already been proposed five times to Austria since 1915, chiefly by Russia. As for Italy, she had done the same three weeks ago, asking for nothing but the Trentino. The Emperor had refused to respond to these overtures, so as not to duplicate the negotiations being carried on by Prince S. From the Italian requirements enunciated by Mr. Lloyd George, the Emperor concluded that Italy was trying to obtain through the mediation of her allies even more than she was asking directly.

Besides, these demands had no warrant in ethnography. The Dalmatian Islands did not contain Italians. Their inhabitants would kill the Italians who came there. Even in the Trentino, a plebiscite made under a neutral and impartial administration would turn against Italy. In any event, the Emperor would not allow such a procedure, which would create a precedent for other nationalities.

The hypothesis of a rectification of the frontier on the Isonzo, which has been brought into consideration in the course of this conversation, is not ruled out *a priori*, but it was declared that the cession of Gorizia, through which the railway line runs to Trieste, was impossible.

While he could assuredly defeat the Italians, the Emperor prefers to avoid new hecatombs; so he wishes to continue negotiations in order to attain peace. He agrees to make a separate peace with the Entente, but he does not wish to be compelled for the time being to perform an act of positive hostility against Germany, such as it would be to attack her the moment that peace was concluded. He does not think that for her part, Germany will attack him. If she does so, he thinks he is capable of holding his own.

At the present time he warns the Entente that, out of 80 divisions, Germany has just moved 41 from the Eastern Front to take them to the Western Front. He adds that the Russian soldiers—and even the officers—are constantly coming into the Austrian lines to ask whether peace has been made, and that they only shoot when there are Generals present. The Austrians are being careful not to take the initiative in hostilities. It is not the same on the German Front, where they continue to use their machine-guns on the Russians.

\* I had certainly urged the concession of Trieste as well.

During the final negotiations, an armistice would have to be concluded which would leave the troops in their present positions. Count E. thinks that as soon as this armistice has been concluded, the workers in the German factories would go on strike and would cease to manufacture munitions. [There were serious troubles in Germany on 1st May. In Austria, care had been taken to announce the arrival of provisions coming from Roumania, and food was satisfactorily distributed as 1st May was approaching; and this averted all trouble on that date.]

The Emperor thinks that a peace with Austria would bring about one with Bulgaria and Turkey. He considers that we should avoid the inclusion of these Powers in the negotiations so as to avoid wasting time.

Peace made, Austria would be able to let the wheat of Russia come through for France and England; in return, it would feel itself obliged to let the quantities—which are in fact definitely fixed—of wheat sown by the German Army in Roumania and Turkey pass through, as it would have compunctions about depriving Germany of this corn, which is her property.

The associating together of Austrian and German troops is being progressively diminished. Prince S. strongly urged the Emperor to make Count Czernin hold his tongue.

Austrian sympathy goes out to France, with whom she would like in the future to maintain close associations. In this connection, although Prince S. had suggested to him that, to save his face, the Emperor might hand over the Trentino to Italy by way of the mediation of France and England, and not directly, the Emperor is of opinion that a direct handing over would be better, as it would avoid rousing Austrian opinion against us."

As M. Ribot had pointed out in his covering letter, there were two features of special interest in this Note. The first was the information about Italy's secret approach to Austria to secure peace terms—of which we had no previous knowledge; certainly Sonnino could not have been aware of it when he met us at St. Jean de Maurienne. The other was the fact that the Emperor was evidently ready to consider seriously the cession of the Trentino to Italy in order to make a separate peace with us.

While this news was on its way to us, Prince Sixte was in Vienna, where he stayed from 5th to 11th May, 1917, seeing his brother-in-law and discussing peace prospects with him. Though himself only interested in the desires of France, the Prince urged on the Emperor that it would be wise for him to concede what was necessary to Italy in order to secure an early peace, for if America were to take part in the final peace settlement, she would probably want to partition the monarchy.



The Emperor expressed agreement with this view, and said that Austria wished after the War to ally herself with France, and through France, with England and possibly America to assure alike her own independence and the peace of the world. As matters stood, the Italian difficulty seemed alone to block the way. He told the Prince again about the Italian approach at Berne to the ambassadors of the Central Powers. The envoy was an Italian Colonel, whose identity was known, and who was not in any sense a private adventurer.

On 9th May, 1917, the Emperor handed to the Prince a second letter for the Allies, expressing the wish to keep the negotiations open. It was accompanied by a note in German by Count Czernin, setting out the points which had been made clear in the conversations between Sixte and Karl. Armed with these documents, the Prince returned on 12th May to Neuchâtel, where he parted from Count Erdödy, the Emperor's envoy, after getting from him the following further statement by Karl about the Italian offer:—

“Neuchâtel,

12th May, 1917.

The Emperor states that the Italian demand for peace was made in the following way:—

A special delegate came from the Italian General Headquarters to Berne, about a week before the interview at St. Jean de Maurienne. He went first to the German Minister and then to the Austrian. Their demand was addressed first to Germany, and offered peace on the sole condition that Austria should cede the Trentino; Gorizia and Monfalcone remaining Austrian so that the railway communication with Trieste need not come within range of Italian guns. Only Aquileia was to become Italian. The offer was inspired by the general attitude of the Italian Army, now weary of the War, and by fear of a revolution. *Sonnino knows nothing of this move. It is certain, however, that it has been made with the approval of a strong group of politicians (e.g. Giolitti and Tittoni) and that it comes from the King of Italy.*

Germany was asked to put pressure upon Austria to make her accept these terms.”

Count Erdödy also amplified the documentary material carried by the Prince with further verbal statements about the arrangements that would be involved in the separate peace; discussing matters such as exchange of prisoners, the food situation, relations with America and the situation on the Russian Front. Germany would be unable to feed her people once Austria-Hungary abandoned her. She would have insufficient corn and fats. “What Germany principally lacked was fats, grease for cooking, and grease for her machinery. A dinner without grease was in Germany a contradiction in terms.” “In

Germany there had been very serious outbreaks, due to hunger. The general feeling was that the workers there ought to force the Government's hand to make peace, supposing Austria were to do so. . . . The ill-feeling between Germany and Austria was increasing, on account of the Austrians being better fed than the Germans."

As regards the cession of the Trentino, the Emperor could only do this in return for some sort of immediate compensation. He could not postpone that in the hope of getting Silesia from Germany, and in any case could not bargain for compensation at the expense of his ally's territory. One of the African colonies of Italy, or concessions in Greece, might be considered.

The Prince reached Paris again on 16th May, but it was not until the 20th that he succeeded in getting an interview with the President and M. Ribot. They had a lengthy but unsatisfactory discussion. M. Ribot found himself unable to see anything except the difficulties in the way of doing something definite. The offer of the Emperor to reinstate Serbia he found inadequate without definite mention of Cattaro and Durazzo. Nothing had yet been settled about Roumania. Moreover there was the Polish question. As to Italy, it was impossible to ask her to be content with less than had been promised her when she came into the War. The Italian peace offer to the Central Powers doubtless proceeded from the Giolitti Party and from General Porro, the Deputy Chief of the Italian General Staff, but he could not believe that the King and Cadorna were privy to it. Anyhow, they could do nothing till they had invited the King of Italy to pay a visit to the French Front, and had a talk with him about the whole matter.

Prince Sixte said he must now visit England and call on me, as I had asked him to let me know the result of his interview and talk it over with him. Sixte noted that "from 31st March to 22nd April the French Premier's attitude was, in the words of a privileged spectator of these negotiations, that of a man who will successively 'hesitate, procrastinate, suspect, withdraw, and then stand still.'"

When the Prince asked what reply he was to send to the Emperor, Ribot explained that this could not be settled out of hand, as it would take some time to arrange the King of Italy's visit to the French Front, and therefore the matter was not pressing. There was "plenty of time." Unfortunately, the Emperor had presented the opportunity to the French: the initiative was therefore in their hands, and they grasped the lever with a jealous clutch which resented any other hand. When I showed some impatience at delays and doubts in seizing this opportunity to detach Austria and thus bring the Central Alliance tumbling to the ground, I was accused of being "apt to be quick in action" or according to Jules Cambon, "an impetuous Celt."

I wrote to M. Ribot on 14th May, acknowledging his letter and the

document containing the information which had reached Paris on 9th May from Count Erdödy. In my reply I said:—

“The letter, of which you have been good enough to send me a copy, seems to me to be a document of grave importance, and having regard to the critical situation in Russia it would, in my judgment, be a very serious responsibility for you and myself if we failed to make further enquiry as to the possibilities which this letter opens up of dividing the Central Powers. Under the circumstances, I think it highly desirable that you and your informant and myself should have an early conference as to the best method of investigating further the suggestions made in the letter of which you sent me a copy.”

M. Ribot did not at this stage adopt my suggestion of a meeting to confer about the developments of the matter, but after seeing Prince Sixte, he wrote me on the 20th May, 1917, advising me that the Prince was about to visit me. His letter ran:—

“Dear Mr. Lloyd George,

Prince S. should arrive in London to-morrow. He will lay before you an autograph letter which you will read with interest. We have repeated to the Prince that it was impossible for us to do anything without Italy. I hold to the opinion that the step which is spoken of in the letter cannot have been authorised by the King. It seems to me absolutely necessary to get to the bottom of the matter. The simplest way would be to speak of it to the King himself, and for this purpose, to invite him to come to France to pay a visit to our Army and to the British Army, which would enable us, without raising suspicion, to arrange an interview with him, with H.M. the King of Great Britain, and the President of the Republic. You could accompany His Britannic Majesty in the same way as I should accompany M. Poincaré. We could see if it is possible to open up a conversation with some chance of coming to terms. You will not disguise from yourself the fact that an understanding will be very difficult. We cannot, in fact, sacrifice Serbia, nor above all, Roumania, which only came into the War at our request. We must in any case act with the greatest prudence, and I think that, until further notice, confidences which have been entrusted to us, and which it was our duty to accept, ought to remain between those persons alone who have up to the present had knowledge of them.

Believe me, dear Mr. Lloyd George, etc.,

A. RIBOT.”

Prince Sixte arrived in London in the evening of 22nd May, and on the following day he came to see me at Downing Street, bringing the autograph letter with him.



This second letter from the Emperor Karl was in the following terms:—

“9th May, 1917.

My dear Sixte,

I note with satisfaction that France and England share my views upon what I believe to be the essential basis of a European peace. At the same time they express their opposition to any peace in which Italy does not participate. As it happens, Italy has just proposed to me to make peace with the Monarchy, renouncing all the inadmissible claims which she has up to this date advanced for the annexation of the Slavonic States of the Adriatic. She has limited her claim to that portion of the Tyrol where the language is Italian. I have for my part postponed the examination of this matter until I hear from you what answer France and England make to my offer of peace. Count Erdödy will tell you my view and that of my Chancellor on the various points involved.

The good understanding which the Monarchy has reached with France and England on a number of essential points will enable us, we are convinced, to overcome the remaining difficulties which stand in the way of the conclusion of an honourable peace.

I thank you for the help you are at present giving me in this task of peace-making, which I have undertaken in the common interest of our countries. As you told me when you went away, this War laid upon you the duty of remaining faithful to your name and to the historic past of your House, first by attending to the wounded on the battlefield, and afterwards yourself fighting for France. I fully understand your motives, and although we were separated by events for which I have no personal responsibility whatever, my affection for you is unaltered. I trust that with your consent it may be possible to express my own personal views to France and England without employing any other interpreter than yourself.

I beg you to be assured once again of my most warm and fraternal affection.

CHARLES.”

The note written by Count Czernin, which was attached to the Emperor's letter, was in the following terms:—

“(1) A one-sided cession of territory on the part of Austria-Hungary is out of the question; in the event of a compensation by counter-cession the idea could be discussed, provided that account is taken of the fact that the ground heroically defended and watered with the blood of our soldiers has for us an incomparably higher value than any new territory.

(2) What are the guarantees which are offered us that in a Peace Conference the integrity of the Monarchy (subject to the rectifications of frontier already agreed on) will be preserved?

(3) A definite answer can only be given after the foregoing two points have been replied to, *since Austria-Hungary cannot before this enter into discussions with her allies.*

(4) In any event, Austria-Hungary is prepared to go on with the discussions, and in future as in the past is ready to work for an *honourable* peace, and therewith also to prepare the way for general World Peace."

I studied both these documents with great interest, and got from them not too favourable an impression of the prospects of carrying through a peace negotiation with Austria. Czernin was clearly opposed to any concessions to Italy and he also contemplated not a separate peace talk with Austria but a negotiation in which all Austria's allies were to be consulted. That would have been fatal. As far as Austria herself was concerned the main difficulty, of course, was still Italy. Sixte doubted whether Austria would consider one of the African colonies of Italy a sufficient compensation for the surrender of the Trentino. He gave me all the further details he could about the alleged Italian offer to Austria. It was clearly a story about the truth of which it would be hard to get verification unless the quarters in Italy responsible for the move saw fit to own up to their action.

I told the Prince that if any progress were to be made, we should have to arrange discussions among persons capable of making responsible decisions. Something might be done if a meeting could be arranged between Czernin, Ribot and myself. I did not want a meeting of diplomats who had no authority to commit their respective countries.

I made an arrangement for the King to receive Prince Sixte and myself that afternoon at three o'clock.

After the visit to the Palace I arranged with Sixte that I would communicate forthwith with M. Ribot, and on hearing from him would be better able to give the Prince an answer to take back to the Emperor Karl.

I wrote at once the following letter to the French Premier:—

"10, Downing Street,  
Whitehall, S.W.1.  
23rd May, 1917.

Dear M. Ribot,

I saw to-day your informant and took him to the King. The latter concurs in your suggestion that a meeting should be arranged in France between the two Kings and President Poincaré, with their representative Ministers. Will you kindly take the necessary

steps to invite the Kings of England and Italy to visit the French Front at an early date?

In inviting the King of Italy, it might be intimated that President Poincaré was anxious to have an immediate discussion on the Russian situation, as to which he had received special information. I fear that unless the King of Italy is told that there is some special object in an early meeting he will postpone it for some weeks, when the opportunity which now offers may have passed away. We want if possible to concentrate our efforts on crushing the German military power. No other power counts. May I ask for your views on these suggestions? The special messenger will await a reply.

A thousand congratulations on your powerful speech in the Chamber. It has created a great impression on this side.

Yours, etc.,

D. LLOYD GEORGE."

M. Ribot's reply to this letter, written on the 24th May, was as follows:—

"Dear Mr. Lloyd George,

In accordance with your advice I am about to telegraph to M. Barrère for him to invite the King of Italy to pay a visit to France as early as possible under the conditions that you suggest.

It is of the greatest urgency that we should hold a conversation. I have asked M. Paul Cambon whether I can come for the week-end if you will be in London on Sunday and Monday next. I can hardly spare more than these two days, and, at a pinch, of the daytime of Tuesday.

If I am not held up by vital affairs, it is my intention to set out for London on Saturday, with the Minister for War, M. Painlevé.

It would be best for us to come to a really sound agreement about the question of Salonika and that of Greece. We shall also have to talk about Russia and Asia Minor.

I am very touched by what you have said about my speech. I am pleased to see that Lord Robert Cecil spoke yesterday in the same sense in the House of Commons.

I will expect a telegram either from you direct or from M. Paul Cambon, so that I can make my arrangements.

Very affectionately yours,  
A. RIBOT."

The Anglo-French Conference for which M. Ribot asked in this letter was duly held in London on Monday, 28th May, running on to Tuesday morning. Greece was the principal topic of discussion, and the Stockholm Conference and problems of tonnage were also reviewed. But of course the Prince Sixte correspondence could not



be brought into conference, as it was still a matter of the strictest secrecy.

Meantime Prince Sixte, after parting from me, had paid a visit to Paul Cambon and had then retired to the Isle of Wight to be at hand for further developments. His account of his interview with Cambon reveals the immense suspicion which that diplomat felt for Italy, and makes it easy to understand why these negotiations were not pressed through with much fervour by French statesmen. Cambon was quite clear that the Italians would prove a rock upon which the hopes of a separate peace with Austria would founder. He was no less clear that this would on balance be a good thing. For if once Italy got enough out of Austria to be willing to sign a peace with her, he was confident that she would forthwith drop her alliance with the Entente, and render them no further help in the War. She would on the contrary seize the opportunity while other countries were exhausting themselves in the conflict, to expand industrially and commercially, and advance her own interests at the expense of France.

Cambon was of opinion that peace between Austria and Italy would benefit those two Powers only and not France, and that the shock sustained by Germany would not balance the loss of Italy's support.

Cambon was a man of remarkable perspicacity and judgment, but where strong prejudices intervene the shrewdest man is often no better than the fool. To hold that the possible defection of Italy would not be compensated tenfold if the millions of Austrian troops were withdrawn from the ranks of our enemies; if Turkey and Bulgaria were cut off from Germany and forced to make terms; if the Austrian submarines were withdrawn from the Mediterranean, and submarine bases there were closed; if our Armies in Salonika, Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia could be reduced to garrisons; if the corn of Russia and the Danube could be brought to France and if on the other hand, the food, petroleum and other supplies of the Dual Monarchy and Roumania were withheld from Germany; if Prussian militarism, deserted as it would be by all its allies, and opposed by the most powerful nations in the world, were forced into a position of foredoomed defeat—to ignore all these advantages which must follow from a separate peace with Austria, and be prepared to forego them all, rather than let Italy have a chance of becoming stronger economically and industrially—appears an unbalanced attitude of mind. Yet this seems to have been the quite serious view taken by Cambon. To some extent he influenced Ribot. He damped his ardour with suspicions and clogged his activity with doubts.

The Cambons—Jules and Paul—were exceptionally able diplomats. They were intensely patriotic. France was their faith—their shrine—their worship—their deity. The first commandment of the

true French patriot is: "Thou shalt have no other gods but France." It is a type or quality of patriotism which springs more naturally from the soil of France than that of any other land. Are Englishmen also not patriots? Yes, they are, but with them patriotism is a duty, with Frenchmen it is a fanaticism. Great leaders of men prove their gift of leadership by the appeals they address to those who under their command are called upon to fight against odds. Nelson's call to the English sailors was to respond to England's expectation that they should do their duty. Napoleon's appeal was to the glories of France. It was a love of country planted and raised during the torrid summer of the great Revolution, when the integrity and independence of France were threatened by all the monarchs of Europe, and matured whilst the French legions under Napoleon were tramping through the streets of every capital (except one) where these monarchs reigned. They were beaten in the end by a combined Europe. But national greatness does not depend as much on victory, as on the grandeur of the struggle put up by a people. No other country possesses the experiences of France, and one has always to remember, in dealing with French statesmen, that this great era of their national glory is at the roots of their policy. In negotiating with them it is a complex which interferes seriously with any attempt to secure a reasonable accommodation which takes the interests of other nations into account. It is always obtruding itself at inconvenient moments.

Cleverly, and with every appearance of helping them along, the *Sixte pourparlers* were manœuvred into futility. The subtle and expert Cambon brain directed the stately steps of the unsuspecting Ribot hither and thither—anywhere so long as it did not lead on the direct road to a peace with Austria which would make Italy bigger, stronger, more triumphant, whilst France was still left wrestling in her own mud with her deadly adversary—her strength flowing steadily out of her torn veins. No patriotic Frenchman could bear that thought without a pang of jealousy. That explains the attitude of Jules Cambon, the rumbling protests about "secret diplomacy" in the French Chamber, and the French journals. It accounts also for the faltering of M. Ribot.

The British Government were helpless. We were entirely in the hands of France. The offer had been made to her, and the confidential intermediary, Prince Sixte, was a Frenchman; although he was devoted to the Empress Zita, he was mainly concerned with what he felt to be French interests. M. Paul Cambon's assurance to him that he would really be doing France no service if he carried the negotiations through successfully must have cooled his zeal and checked his activities. A French Royalist Prince could not face an insinuation that he had bargained away the interests of France to serve an enemy relative.

In the matter of the invitation to the King of Italy we were again in the hands of the French. Whatever the terms of the invitation sent, they were not effective in persuading Sonnino to come to France with his monarch. On 30th May, Prince Sixte returned to London, eager to complete his mission by securing our answer to the Emperor's letter, and then get back to his guns on the Belgian Front. But no reply had as yet come to hand. I persuaded him to stay on a few days longer until the Italian reply had been received. A first answer turned up a few hours later, but it was of an evasive nature. Baron Sonnino said that he saw no need for a meeting of the Allies at present. I thereupon sent off a letter to him by special courier, emphasising the fact that the proposed meeting was of real importance.

No answer to this had arrived by 5th June, when Prince Sixte called on me for a final interview before returning to the Continent. But in the meantime, on 3rd June the Italian Government had proclaimed a protectorate over Albania. This action may have been inspired by the comparative failure of the offensive which Cadorna had launched on the Isonzo on 12th May. A measure of advance had been achieved, but had been brought to a standstill without coming anywhere within striking distance of the road to Trieste. Failing to get near that city, the Italians had consoled themselves by announcing the annexation of Albania. It was not a step calculated to simplify the problem of negotiations with Austria.

When Prince Sixte called on me for the last time on 5th June, I told him how fully I shared his annoyance at the delays which the Italians were making.

The Prince asked me to let him have some answer even if the Italians would not meet us. I assured him that we should do our best to insist on an answer from Sonnino and from his Sovereign. "The chance of peace with Austria is too important for us to let it slip. For the moment, we can only say that these negotiations with Italy make the whole thing long and difficult, but that, once they are settled, things will move faster."

On reaching Paris, the Prince had an interview with M. William Martin, of the French Foreign Office, who told him that Baron Sonnino had no intention of meeting the English and French ministers. Sixte asked for some message that he could convey to Karl as the answer of the French to his letter. But for some time longer he heard nothing. On 20th June he was told that in M. Ribot's opinion, "Nothing can be done for the present; we can do nothing without Italy." On 23rd June, M. Jules Cambon had a long interview with the Prince, and explained the situation to him as it appeared to the French Foreign Office. They were having a good deal of trouble with Italy, because both France and Italy were making large demands with respect to Asia Minor, "on the principle



of ask the more to get the less." In Greece the French and Italians were also pursuing conflicting policies. Sonnino was refusing to meet the other Allied Premiers in a discussion. M. Cambon said that I was taking up energetically the idea of negotiations with Austria, whereas the French were not too eager to press these forward rapidly. But the Allied Premiers would be meeting in mid-July for a conference. The French President shared Cambon's view that Italy could not be allowed to get the Trentino until France had secured possession of Alsace-Lorraine—an attitude which really made it impossible for the prospective terms of a separate peace with Austria to be executed until Germany was defeated. In view of this conversation, Prince Sixte returned to his regiment and abandoned his efforts at peace-making.

Meantime in France, where, throughout the War, it seemed all but impossible to keep a secret, some kind of rumour appears to have leaked out about these negotiations. In a debate in the Chamber on 5th June, charges about "secret diplomacy" were levelled at the Premier, M. Ribot, who repudiated them with virtuous indignation. "Secret diplomacy has been mentioned: there can be no secret diplomacy! The fullest publicity should be and shall be given here!" The denial may not have been more than diplomatically truthful, but the attack doubtless scared Ribot away from any attempts to press further with negotiations.

The Italians did not come into conference until 25th July, when an Inter-Allied conference was held in Paris. By this time M. Ribot felt it too late to challenge Cadorna about the alleged Italian peace approach to Austria. But he took the course of showing Sonnino all the correspondence. If he felt entitled thus for reasons of overriding public interest to break his solemn promise to Prince Sixte, it surely ought to have been done in April. I never urged it. In April I entreated Prince Sixte to release the French Government from its bond, but when he firmly declined I felt we were bound to keep faith at all costs. This revelation did not penetrate Baron Sonnino's resistance. By this time the question of negotiating a separate peace with Austria had resolved itself into a struggle between Giolitti and Sonnino for the soul of the King, and the Italian Foreign Minister resented our interference in a matter of domestic controversy. The correspondence was not of course discussed in open conference, but at the session in the afternoon of 26th July I pointed out the possibilities of action to drive Austria out of the War.

Thus the negotiations opened up through Prince Sixte fell to the ground. Even after waiting for two months, I was unable to give any answer beyond the fact that as yet nothing had been settled with Italy. France, which was in responsible charge of the negotiations, was at heart unwilling to press them forward. Jealous in any case of Italian expansion, she was particularly averse to helping her

neighbour to enjoy possession of her irredentist territories while still uncertain whether she herself would be able to secure her lost provinces. These considerations appear to have outweighed with the French politicians the immense military advantages to be secured by eliminating Austria from the conflict.

There was also an element of distrust which has always disturbed the relations between allies in every combination that ever existed. If Italy were satisfied, France was convinced she would render no further help in the War. When one bears in mind that our hopes of success in these negotiations were based on the assumption that Austria would betray Germany we had no right to complain of the cynical suspicions of France.

Baron Sonnino might perhaps have pleaded in 1919 that his obduracy was justified by the terms of peace which Italy enforced as a result of her victory. They were territorially and strategically more advantageous than any she could have hoped to secure by any settlement that was possible in 1917.

It was not until 12th October that M. Ribot made any statement which could be regarded as his reply to these peace overtures from Austria. On that date he made a speech in the French Chamber, in the course of which he said:—

“A little time since, it was Austria who declared herself ready to make peace with us, and to satisfy our desires; but she deliberately left Italy out of account, knowing that, were we now to listen to those counsels of deceit, Italy would soon recover her independence and would become the enemy of a France that had forgotten and betrayed her. We did not consent to this!”

This may perhaps be regarded as the final, negative answer of France, six months overdue, to the Emperor Karl's appeal for peace.

“Counsels of deceit” is not a phrase altogether fair to the young Emperor's efforts for peace. He sincerely yearned for peace and so did his French Consort. There is almost a poignancy in his letters to his brother-in-law. He was horrified by the environment in which he mounted his throne. He shuddered at the prospect for himself and his family. In a little over twelve months he was an exile from his native land. A few years later I visited a modest villa at Madeira which was lent to the ex-Emperor Karl by a kindly islander. There he had died in poverty. He was too poor to pay for a doctor to save his life and he was buried at the expense of the same charitable merchant who had provided him with a refuge. In reading through my papers I could see how the shadows of this tragedy darkened the fateful effort of poor Karl to escape from impending doom.

## CHAPTER LXII

### VATICAN AND KUHLMANN PEACE MOVES

HAVING regard to the accumulating horrors of the War it would have been surprising had there been no growing desire for peace. Figures of casualties were everywhere sternly repressed. But after the Somme, concealment of their vastness was no longer possible. The blue uniforms of the wounded and the black vestments of the mourners were visible everywhere.

Britain, up to the Battle of the Somme, had not lost men on the same scale as the rest of the belligerents. But by the end of 1916 her losses were greater than those she had sustained in the aggregate in all her wars put together since the Wars of the Roses, and had cost more than all the wars she had ever waged.

In spite of optimistic dispatches from the battle areas, we were making no headway on any front. On at least two fronts the enemy were advancing. Our reputed victories seemed to end in nothing but a shuddering accumulation of debts and deaths. The end of the year 1916, therefore, witnessed the first manifestations of a desire that the anguish of nations mangling each other in savage combat should be terminated for the sake of our common humanity. The sentiment was by no means confined to those who had opposed the War from the start. In fact, the call for peace would have been louder and more general had it not been that pacifism was discredited in the eyes of the general public by its association with men and women whose views on other subjects were regarded as violent and subversive. There was also the natural fear that any peace move might, and undoubtedly would, have the effect of encouraging the enemy or weakening the morale of our own people. Every stir towards peace in enemy countries was quoted and headlined in Allied countries as a proof that we were winning, and that our foes knew it and were clamouring for a cessation of the fight. That is why men and women who thought the time had come for making peace hesitated to say so in public. Lord Lansdowne displayed great courage and a high sense of public duty when he wrote and circulated amongst his colleagues in the Cabinet, at the end of 1916, his memorandum calling for negotiations. I did not accept his view of the situation. In August, 1914, he was in favour of waging war on Germany if she attacked France, whether Belgium were invaded or



not. I resisted that policy up to the very hour when Belgium was threatened. But once having started the fight, I felt we must see it right through, until the German military machine was smashed. Nevertheless, my respect for Lord Lansdowne's character and patriotism was enhanced by his willingness to face misconstruction and unpopularity by promoting negotiations for peace at a time when the enemy was not only unbeaten, but to all appearances, taking the battlefield as a whole, was winning.

The decision come to by the Asquith Cabinet in November, 1916, that peace overtures were undesirable until the German military power was broken, has already been recorded by me. The war weariness which first began to show itself in all the belligerent countries in 1916 grew rapidly in 1917.

In all the belligerent countries there was labour unrest, due largely to the growing scarcity and price of food. This restlessness was accentuated by the fact of the Russian Revolution and the spectacle of the growing power of labour in that great country. Many of the workers' leaders everywhere saw in that upheaval a more hopeful prospect for the emancipation of their class and the amelioration of its conditions than in a military victory. The revolutionary slogan of "No Annexations or Indemnities" was finding an echo in other countries. The German Socialists were perceptibly influenced by its appeal and it had a definite response also in this country. The feeling here found expression in the multiplication of peace demonstrations held openly without interruption or resentment in all parts of the country, and attended by earnest and enthusiastic crowds. It was also apparent in the increasing labour troubles which interfered seriously with the production of war material. It never seemed to affect the soldiers and I received no reports and heard no rumours of pacifist talk in the trenches, behind the lines, or in our ships. The men who had to bear the hardships and face the dangers of war were not clamouring for peace—they were not even talking about it. There was a sullen determination not to give in until their side won. But in France and Italy, and most of all in Russia, the soldiers were discussing peace, and Governments were nervous as to the dependence that could be placed on their fighting value if it were too highly tested. Generals doubted whether their men could any longer be depended upon to face the slaughter of great offensives. General Pétain had no doubts on the subject, and for that reason he avoided attacks on a great scale. General Cadorna tried his hand at peace overtures with Austria, assigning as his reason the apprehensions he felt as to the influence of insidious peace propaganda on his troops. The Russian Generals constantly put off projected and promised offensives because they could not trust their troops to advance into the fire.

As to enemy countries, one heard as early as 1915 that Austria was

tired, and that some of her leaders were becoming frightened of the ultimate effect on the Monarchy of the unexpected prolongation of the War. In 1916, Jane Addams, the famous American leader of women's movements called upon me at 11, Downing Street, on her return from a Continental tour. She had visited Germany, Austria and France and wished to tell me all about it and at the same time influence me in the direction of peace. In Vienna she had had an interview with the Austrian Premier. Having explained to him that she had come there to find out whether it was not possible to bring this horrible war to a peaceful end, she said: "I have no doubt you are saying to yourself at this moment, this American woman is quite mad." He replied: "Mad? Do you see that door?" At this she thought he was terminating the interview brusquely, but he went on "Every hour of the day and far into the night men come through that door and say to me: 'We want more men for the trenches—we want more guns—more ammunition, more money.' Mad, indeed? You are the only sensible person that has passed through that door for a long time." The Austrians were not happy about the war they had provoked. A sense of impending catastrophe was chilling the air of Vienna.

As to Germany, there was no sense of fear, but rather of disillusionment. Her wonderful army was everywhere winning resounding triumphs, but the final triumph seemed no nearer. Victories did not seem to bring victory. The German military chiefs were gambling on the tables of death for world supremacy. From time to time they made wonderful coups, but so far the only real winner was the grim croupier. And now came the U-boat triumph with sinkings of British, Allied and Neutral ships that ran into millions of tons. But England did not slacken her efforts or lower her arrogant flag by an inch. Ammunition was flung more lavishly than ever on the German lines in France and Flanders. Unless Hindenburg won this year, the Americans would arrive next year. There was not much time to lose. And the food situation was growing steadily worse. There were strikes in the workshops, the Socialists were agitating for peace overtures, and now the Centre had joined them in bringing pressure to bear upon the Government. The German soldier stood in his battered trenches as firmly as ever, and was willing to give to faltering allies an example of the way to fight battles from Beersheba to the Carpathians. In fact, at this stage of the War, the German and the British troops alone on the whole battlefield remained quite unshaken by horror or propaganda. It is fair, however, to say that neither army had endured the same losses as the French and, moreover, they were better supported in the matter of guns and ammunition than the Italians. But if the German in the battle lines was still resolute, at home in the Fatherland there were misgivings. The German people were beginning to crave for an honourable and

not necessarily a triumphant end to their sacrifices. Food, and especially the fat foods that bring contentment, because they give warmth and comfort, were scarce and becoming scarcer. The rich lands of Russia and Roumania had been scraped clean and it would take another year to dig out their inherent fertility. All Germans were prepared to fight to the last for the integrity and independence of the Fatherland, but most of them viewed with growing reluctance the idea of continuing the colossal sacrifices being made for world dominance. Annexation had ceased to appeal to those whose sons and husbands and brothers were facing death to achieve conquest. They certainly were not prepared to make that sacrifice to avenge further the death of an Austrian Prince, for whom even his own people had no special affection. They thought that the millions of dead (foes and friends) were an adequate oblation on the tomb of this undistinguished personage.

The German Peace Note of December, 1916, was prompted partly by a desire to propitiate this sentiment and partly with the purpose of demonstrating to hesitating allies and uneasy neutrals, especially to the most powerful of all the neutrals, the United States of America, that the prolongation of the War was due to the spirit of rapacity and revenge which animated Allied statesmanship. There was also the knowledge that the wish for peace was spreading amongst all circles in England. The Lansdowne move was known in Germany. German statesmen were anxious to take advantage of this gesture to weaken Britain's will. Their Peace Note was so arrogant in its tone that it had the opposite effect in both England and America from that which it was intended to produce. The proverbial clumsiness of German diplomacy once more defeated its purpose. To be quite frank, Allied statesmen were in no mood for peace conferences. France was very much exhilarated by the prospect of the new model offensive which was at last going to rupture the German line. The British Army was stronger in numbers and equipment than it had ever been. It had fought one great battle and had shown that the half-trained levies of Britain could hold their own with any soldier in the field. The imminence of the Russian Revolution was not foreseen at that date. When it came, America was in the field. For a long job it was a good swop.

The French defeat in May ending in a certain collapse in the temper of the French Army, coupled with the crash of Russia, created a new situation. The Peace Party in Germany thought this was a propitious moment for renewing the overtures bungled away in the winter. They were supposed to have secured a measure of sympathy, if not actual encouragement, from Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. This amiable bureaucrat was not a man of war by proclivity or proficiency. He was therefore an object of distrust and almost detestation to the fighting admirals and generals of Germany. They



knew he had assented to the War with reluctance and that he waged it without enthusiasm. When he surrendered to militarist dictation, he did so in such tactless words as showed that he was not thinking so much of weakening the army abroad, but of propitiating his enemies at home. When they found him, as they thought, intriguing with Socialists and Catholics to stop their war on terms which flung away their conquests, just as they imagined they were winning out on land and sea, they were infuriated, and they succeeded in persuading the intimidated Kaiser to get rid of this troublesome minister who had no love for dominion gained through slaughter. He was succeeded by Michaelis, an intelligent—but not over-intelligent—official of the Wilhelmstrasse. Michaelis knew why he was given the Chancellorship. He was there to obey the orders of the real Masters of Germany. He was not to quarrel openly with the timorous defeatists of the Reichstag. He was authorised to delude them by a show of pacific disposition. On the other hand, he was to make it clear that the time and terms of peace were for him to declare and not for them. On the 19th July, 1917, the Reichstag passed the following resolution:—

“As on 4th August, 1914, so on the threshold of the fourth year of the War, the German people are inspired by the words contained in the speech from the Throne ‘We are not led by desire for conquests.’ Germany has taken up arms for Liberty and Independence, and for the integrity of her territory. The Reichstag desires a peace of conciliation and a lasting reconciliation of all peoples.

Enforced territorial aggrandisement with political, economic and financial control, cannot be reconciled with that programme. The Reichstag also rejects all plans about economic isolation and the enmity of peoples after the War. The freedom of the seas must be made sure. Only an economic peace can pave the way for friendly co-operation among the peoples. We will also strongly encourage the creation of international law organisations.

Germany will fight until the Allies stop threatening her and her allies with conquests.”

The motion was opposed fiercely by the Junker Party, but carried in spite of their resistance by 214 votes to 116. The resolution itself expressed in general words the desire of the German Parliament for peace. As to the terms it was vague. There was no definite and clear declaration that all the occupied territory in the West, the East and the South-East would be restored without condition or reservation. Neither Belgium nor Poland were alluded to by name. Inferentially they were included in the phrase about “No forcible acquisition of territory.” But there was nothing said about adjustments of frontier or conditions to be imposed on them in the interests of military security or economic co-operation. Many—perhaps most—of the Deputies meant honestly to give back the occupied territories wholly

and unreservedly. Some of them certainly did not. Here is an extract from one of the speeches delivered in the debate by a Deputy, explaining the meaning of the resolution:—

“The War must end in some tangible result. The Imperial Chancellor has now shown us the tangible result in the East. For the West he has spoken with greater caution. Belgium, an *avulsus imperii*, must not remain England's bulwark. The necessary result of that is that she must be in our power from the political, military and economic point of view. (Hear, hear.) But this would not touch the political organisation of the country. The really final terms of peace might settle that. We pursue—and I repeat this after the Imperial Chancellor—no war of conquest. But we must adjust our frontiers in accordance with our own interests.”

More ominous than these omissions was the speech delivered the same day by Chancellor Michaelis. He said:—

“Germany did not wish for war and did not strive for expansion of her power by violence. Therefore she will not prosecute the War a single day longer after an honourable peace is obtainable merely to make conquests by violence. What we wish is, first, to conclude peace as those would who have successfully carried through their purpose. . . . A nation of not even 70,000,000, which, side by side with its loyal allies, had held its place, weapon in hand, before the frontiers of its country against the manifold superiority of masses of nations, has proved itself unconquerable. To me our aims are clear from this situation.

First of all, the territory of the Fatherland is inviolable. With an enemy who demands parts of our Empire, we cannot parley. If we make peace we must, in the first line, make sure that the frontiers of the German Empire are made secure for all time.

We must, by means of an understanding and give and take, guarantee the conditions of existence of the German Empire upon the Continent and Overseas. . . . The Government feels that if our enemies abandon their lust for conquest and their aims of subjugation, and wish to enter into negotiations, we shall listen honestly, and ready for peace, to what they have to say to us. Until then we must hold out calmly, patiently, and courageously.”

He ended his speech with these significant words:—

“The Constitutional rights of the Imperial Administration to conduct our policy must not be narrowed. I am not willing to permit the conduct of affairs to be taken from my hands.”

It was not merely that he added a blur to the vagueness of the Reichstag about Belgium, but he ended up with a stern warning to that timorous assembly to mind their own business.

On the same day the German Chief of Staff, General von Ludendorff, said:—

‘In starting the submarine war the supreme Army Command was guided by the desire to hit the enemy’s war industry, especially his production of ammunition. Through the submarine war our armies in the West have experienced great relief, and the enemy supply of ammunition has decreased. The U-boats have accomplished this task. The co-operation of the Navy and Army has proved to be perfect. The Supreme Army Command expects from the U-boat war that it will interfere with England’s readiness for war by lessening her tonnage. The fulfilment of this expectation will also come, and with it in spite of America, the end of the World War and *a peace such as is desired by the Supreme Army Command.*”

Two days later, on 21st July, speaking at a Belgian demonstration at the Queen’s Hall, I dwelt on the Michaelis speech. The Reichstag had no executive authority and had no means, short of revolution or the refusal of supplies to the Armies in the field, by which they could impose their will on the executive. It was therefore the Chancellor’s speech that mattered at this stage. Parliament did not control the Administration as it does here. The Chancellor was the man I would have to deal with and not the President of the Reichstag or Herr Scheidemann. I intended the speech as an invitation to the German Chancellor to clear up obscurities in his declaration to the Reichstag. I said:—

“There is a new Chancellor. The Junker has thrown the old Chancellor into the waste paper basket with his scrap of paper, and they are lying there side by side. You will not have to wait long before Junkerdom will follow. What hope is there in his speech of peace—I mean an honourable peace, which is the only possible peace? It is a dexterous speech. A facing-all-ways speech. There are phrases for those who earnestly desire peace—many. But there are phrases which the military authorities of Germany will understand—phrases about making the frontiers of Germany secure. That is the phrase which annexed Alsace-Lorraine; that is the phrase which has drenched Europe with blood from 1914 onward; that is the phrase which, if they dare, will annex Belgium; and that is the phrase which will once more precipitate Europe into a welter of blood within a generation unless it is wiped out of the statesmanship of Europe. But there are phrases for men of democratic mind in that speech—many. He means to call up men out of the Reichstag to co-operate with the Government; they are even to get office. But there were phrases to satisfy the Junkers. There



was to be no parting with Imperialistic rights. Ah! They will call men from the Reichstag to office, but they will be not Ministers, but clerks. It is the speech of a man waiting on the military situation, and let the Allies—Russia, Britain, France, Italy, all of them—bear that in mind. It is a speech that can be made better by improving the military situation. If the Germans win in the West, if they destroy the Russian Army in the East, if their friends the Turks drive Britain out of Mesopotamia, if the U-boats sink more merchant ships, then that speech, believe me, means annexation all round and military autocracy more firmly established than ever. But, on the other hand, should the German Army be driven back in the West, be beaten in the East, and should their friends the Turks fail in Baghdad, and the submarines be a failure on the High Seas, that speech is all right. We must all help to make that a good speech. There are possibilities in it of excellence. Let us help Dr. Michaelis; let us give assistance to the new Chancellor to make his first speech a real success. But, for the moment, it means that the military party have won.

I want to repeat in another form a statement which I made before. What manner of Government they choose to rule over them is entirely the business of the German people themselves; but what manner of Government we can trust to make peace with is our business. Democracy is in itself a guarantee of peace, and if you cannot get it in Germany then we must secure other guarantees as a substitute. The German Chancellor's speech shows, in my judgment, that those who are in charge of affairs in Germany have, for the moment, elected for war."

As to Belgium I said:—

"The determination of the Allies is this, that Belgium must be restored as a free and an independent people. Belgium must be a people and not a Protectorate. We must not have a Belgian scabbard for the Prussian sword. The sceptre must be Belgian, the sword must be Belgian, the scabbard must be Belgian, the soul must be Belgian."

How accurately I had gauged the real meaning of the Michaelis speech will be apparent when I come to relate the decision of the German Imperial War Council held a few weeks later at Berlin.

On 26th July there was a debate in the House of Commons on an amendment to the Consolidated Fund Bill moved by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. In the course of his speech Mr. MacDonald called upon the Government:—

"in conjunction with the Allies to restate their peace terms accordingly."

He referred to the Reichstag resolution and said that it was: —

“one of the difficulties whenever peace comes, whether after military victory or in any other event, that this Government and the Allies will have to face—the difficulty of not being able to deal directly with the representatives of the German people or with the German people themselves. . . .”

He put forward a demand that the Government should “promote in every way the consultation of Allied peoples.”

He was seconded by Mr. Trevelyan who declared in the course of his speech: —

*“To my mind the primary test of good faith to us in England—without which we shall all regard peace as impossible—is a clear understanding that Germany shall evacuate and restore Belgium and France without attaching economic or strategic considerations to it.”*

In the course of the same debate Mr. Asquith said: —

“I am, I confess, like the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Bonar Law), unable to attach any very definite significance to the array of more or less ambiguous generalities of which this Peace resolution consists. . . . Peace . . . is subject to one all important condition; that it is a peace which does not defeat the purposes with which the free nations of the world have entered upon and have continued the War, and that it does not turn to waste the immeasurable losses and suffering which they have shared and are sharing in common. . . .

I want to put a very plain and specific question with regard to that. Is Germany prepared not only to evacuate Belgium, not only to make full reparation for the colossal mischief and damage which has accompanied her devastating occupation of the country and her practical enslavement, so far as she could carry it out, of large portions of the population; is she prepared not only to do that—this is a very plain question which admits of a very simple answer—but to restore to Belgium, not the pretence of liberty, but a complete, an unfettered and an absolute independence. I should like to know the German Chancellor's answer to that question—not the answer of the Reichstag. I ask him now as far as I may. . . .

Meantime, we should not be helping the advent of peace if we were to give the impression that there is any halting in our determination or any doubt of our ability to carry on, if need be, the burden which we took up with a clear conscience for great ends, and which we can only in honour lay down when we feel sure that those ends are going to be achieved.”

Mr. Wardle, the Labour Member for Stockport, in his speech on the same Motion, associated himself "freely" with what Mr. Asquith had said.

I myself was in France at the time of this debate in the House of Commons and was therefore unable to take part in it, but Mr. Bonar Law in replying said:—

"Here we had for at least 20 years a great military Power, controlled ultimately by one man, which hung as a shadow over the world as a vast thunder-cloud which might burst at any moment. I say we are fighting for peace in the time to come. If a patched-up peace comes now with that German military machine still unbroken, still in the hands of the same people who directed it for the 20 years before the War, have we any security? I think we have the reverse. Have we any security that the same danger which has ruined this generation will not ruin our children when this war is over?"

And in referring to the resolution itself he said:—

"There is one curious feature to be noticed in the terms of this amendment. The honourable gentleman (Mr. Ramsay MacDonald) gave us a full translation of that resolution, but in the amendment based on the resolution there was one curious omission. The resolution contains these words, 'One of the conditions is freedom of the seas.' That does not appear in the amendment. What does that mean? My Right Honourable friend, the late Prime Minister, explained the circumstances in which this resolution was passed. It came as the result of a crisis. Attempts were made to get something which would settle that crisis, and do not let this House mistake for a moment that these words, to which no importance is attached by those who move the amendment, were one of the features which enabled a large section of the Reichstag to vote for this resolution. What do the Germans mean by freedom of the seas? It has only one meaning. It does not arise in time of peace; it arises in time of war, and this is the meaning of it, and it can have no other meaning—that in war a nation with naval power is not to use that power, but a nation with military power is to be subject to no restrictions."

Mr. Snowden, in the course of his speech, said that Mr. Asquith had:—

"endorsed the suggestion that each nation and each people should be given the right to decide the Sovereignty and the Government under which they would live. If we accept that, that settles the question of Alsace-Lorraine."



In the course of the debate, one of the Labour Members read out a resolution adopted by the Labour Party on the question of peace terms.

“The invasion of Belgium and France by the German Army threatens the very existence of independent nationalities and strikes a blow at all faith in treaties. In these circumstances a victory for German Imperialism would be to defeat and destroy democracy and liberty in Europe. The Socialists of Great Britain, France and Russia do not pursue the political and economical crushing of Germany. They are not at war with the peoples of Germany, but only with the Governments of those countries that are oppressed.

They demand that Belgium shall be liberated and compensated.

They desire that the question of Poland shall be settled in accordance with the wishes of the Polish people, either in the sense of autonomy in the midst of another State or in that of complete independence and they wish that throughout all Europe, from Alsace-Lorraine to the Balkans, those populations that have been annexed by force shall receive the right freely to dispose of themselves.”

This will account for the paucity of MacDonald's following in the division, for there certainly was nothing in the Reichstag resolution that would give any hope that the Labour terms would be conceded by the German Government.

Only 19 Members voted for Mr. MacDonald's Amendment. Three Labour Members out of the total 37 Labour strength in the House of Commons followed Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Snowden into the Lobby. The rest were Liberals, who mustered 16 out of the total 260 of the Party in the House. The remainder followed Mr. Asquith and myself into the Government lobby. The result of the division fairly reflected the attitude of the general public in our country towards the Michaelis declaration and the Reichstag resolution.

A division in the House of Commons does not always give a faithful indication of the state of opinion outside. But in this case it is safe to say that had there been a general election immediately after that division not one of the Minority Members would have been returned.

There was a desire for peace, but very few believed that the German authorities meant a real peace of the kind we could honourably accept. The British people, as well as their leaders, suspected a trap. It may be said they had been misled by propaganda. Let those who still think so suspend judgment until they read the official account of what was going on behind the scenes in Germany at that date.

The next serious Peace Move came from the Vatican. On 16th August, the belligerent Governments received a Note from the

Vatican, in which, after a striking exordium dwelling on the increasing horrors of this war, the Pope asks: —

“ Shall, then, the civilized world be nought but a field of death? And shall Europe, so glorious and flourishing, rush, as though driven by universal madness, towards the abyss, and lend her hand to her own suicide?”

Disclaiming any special political aim, and heeding neither the suggestions nor the interests of either of the belligerents, and stating that he is impelled solely by the feeling of his supreme duty as the common father of the people, he suggests terms of peace: —

“ . . . in order no longer to confine ourselves to general terms, such as were counselled by circumstances in the past, we desire now to come down to more concrete and practical proposals, and to invite the Governments of the belligerent peoples to agree upon the following points, which seem as though they ought to be the bases of a just and lasting peace, leaving to their charge the completion and the more precise definition of those points.

First, the fundamental point should be that the moral force of right should replace the material force of arms; hence a just agreement between all for the simultaneous and reciprocal diminution of armaments, according to rules and guarantees to be established, to the extent necessary and sufficient for the maintenance of public order in each State; then in the place of armies, the establishment of arbitration with its exalted pacifying function, on lines to be concerted and with sanctions to be settled against any State that should refuse either to submit international questions to arbitration or to accept its awards.

The supremacy of right once established, let every obstacle be removed from the channels of communication between peoples, by ensuring, under rules likewise to be laid down, the true freedom and common enjoyment of the seas. This would, on the one hand, remove manifold causes of conflict, and would open, on the other, fresh sources of prosperity and progress to all.

As to the reparation of damage and to the costs of war, we see no way to solve the question, save by laying down as a general principle, complete and reciprocal condonation, which would, moreover, be justified by the immense benefits that would accrue from disarmament; all the more, since the continuation of such carnage solely for economic reasons would be incomprehensible. If, in certain cases, there exist, nevertheless, special reasons, let them be weighed with justice and equity.

But these pacific agreements, with the immense advantages they entail, are impossible without the reciprocal restitution of territories now occupied. Consequently on the part of Germany there

must be the complete evacuation of Belgium, with a guarantee of her full political, military and economic independence towards all Powers whatsoever; likewise the evacuation of French territory. On the part of the other belligerent parties, there must be a similar restitution of the German colonies.

As regards territorial questions like those at issue between Italy and Austria, and between Germany and France, there is reason to hope that in consideration of the immense advantages of a lasting peace with disarmament, the parties in conflict will examine them in a conciliatory spirit, taking account in the measure of what is just and possible, as we have before said, of the aspirations of the people and, as occasion may offer, co-ordinating particular interests with the general weal of the great human society.

The same spirit of equity and justice must reign in the study of the other territorial and political questions, notably those relating to Armenia, the Balkan States, and to the territories forming part of the ancient Kingdom of Poland, to which, in particular, its noble historical traditions and the sufferings endured, especially during the present war, ought justly to assure the sympathies of the nations.

Such are the principal bases upon which we believe the future reorganisation of the peoples should be founded.

BENEDICTUS XVI."

As the Holy See had no diplomatic relations with either France, Italy or the United States of America, we were asked by Cardinal Gasparri to be so good as to forward the appeal to the President of the French Republic, the King of Italy, and the President of the American Republic.

The reception of the Note in the British Press was respectful but unfriendly. Although the Pope had preserved a judicious reticence, the Vatican, as a whole, was supposed to be more favourably inclined to the Central Powers than to the Allies. The *Times* unequivocally denounced the Note and said it must be rejected. It was "pro-German and anti-Ally." The "scheme was permeated with German ideas."

These criticisms represented the general attitude of the Allies towards the Pope's appeal. When the Cabinet met to consider what reply should be given to the message, Mr. Balfour indicated to the War Cabinet the attitude of our Allies on the subject so far as it was at present known, which was as follows:—

FRANCE.—M. Ribot considered that it would suffice to reply by a receipt in the ordinary form. If the British Government considered a more formal answer necessary the two Governments must meet. On the other hand a personal letter from M. Albert



Thomas to the Prime Minister was read which indicated that, in his opinion, the Allies ought to give a collective reply.

ITALY.—Baron Sonnino was not disposed to send any answer, and expressed the opinion that the experience of the previous collective answer to the President of the United States was not very encouraging.

RUSSIA.—The Minister for Foreign Affairs considered the Pope's appeal as purely pro-German, and had ordered Russian representatives abroad to propose that the Allies should make some suitable joint answer.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.—Information had been received from a private but reliable source to the effect that President Wilson was doubtful if he would reply at all, but that if he did, his answer would probably take the form of an appreciation of the humanitarian consideration which had animated the Pope's appeal, but would point out the following objections: —

(1) That there is no ground for the belief that the Pope's proposals would meet the views of any belligerent, and for this reason they did not form a good basis for negotiation.

(2) That they practically advocate the *status quo* before the War.

(3) That the entire disregard of International Law by the enemy makes it impossible to rely on any undertakings that he might give, and that Germany is morally bankrupt. President Wilson, however, was understood to hold the view that the door to negotiation should not be entirely closed.

Mr. Balfour drew attention to the fact that the British Government had already acknowledged the receipt of the Pope's Note, and in doing so had stated that his proposals had been received with the most sincere appreciation of their lofty and benevolent intentions, and that they would be studied by His Majesty's Government with the closest and most serious attention.

The Cabinet finally decided, after having thoroughly examined the whole situation, that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should convey an intimation to the Vatican in the sense that, in reply to President Wilson's Peace Note, the Allies had formulated their war aims, but the Central Powers had not, and that on the present occasion we did not propose to send any detailed answer until we had received the reply of the Central Powers.

Those who directed the affairs of the nations knew in their hearts that unless the issue was fought out to a finish, any peace attained at that hour must be in the nature of a truce—a slightly more lasting

Peace of Amiens with war to be renewed on the first pretext when the nations had rested and re-equipped. Germany would have guarded against a repetition of the mistakes which had prevented her plans coming off at the start and were now standing in the way of her complete triumph. In 1914 she did not anticipate a protracted war and was therefore not prepared for it. She would have seen to it that next time her stores of copper and rubber were adequate. When war broke out her granaries had no war reserves. In spite of that fact, she had committed the rashness of selling corn to Holland. She had no stock of fertilisers and her soil was now therefore impoverished without hope of renewal. She had under-estimated the expenditure of ammunition in war under modern conditions. She had therefore no adequate supply of certain essentials. Necessary food ingredients, especially fats, were exhausted, and comforts like coffee were no longer available. All this she could provide against during a long truce, and it need not be very long.

"Never again" for her military leaders did not mean no more war, but not another war under such improvident conditions. France and Italy also had their military "Never agains." Both had committed errors of judgment and were guilty of equally disastrous omissions which delayed victory and nearly brought them irreparable defeat.

Had France foreseen the march through Belgium which turned her flank, she would have fortified her frontiers from Switzerland to the sea. That she could put right during a short cessation of hostilities. Russia could have improved her transport and increased the size and equipment of her arsenals. Nothing would have been settled by the peace except the invincibility of the German Army. The legend of the "invincible army" would have been completely established by the failure of the colossal Allied offensives of the Western Front and the overwhelming Russian and Roumanian defeats on other frontiers. Alsace-Lorraine would still have remained a source of irritation. As to the naval front, Germany would never enter into war again with a second-rate fleet that would not have enabled her to protect her commerce and assure her food supplies and her supply of war material. Almost more important, there would be time to repair the cardinal mistake made in under-estimating the dread possibilities of the submarine, especially of the larger type. There would be swarms ready to launch under the waters by next time.

The temper of the ruling elements in the belligerent countries was not yet tuned or turned towards peace. A patched-up peace would have effected no change in the Governments that constituted the Central Powers. It would have established the power of military autocracy more firmly than ever.

This is the real meaning of President Wilson's reply to the Pope's message, and the explanation of his reluctance to respond at this stage to its appeal. Most pacifist of rulers, the President thought the

cause of permanent peace would be damaged by any settlement which would be acceptable to the military rulers of Germany. They must first of all be overthrown and not only their authority, but their prestige be destroyed. The Allied Governments, in 1917, came to exactly the same conclusion as their predecessors had reached in 1916, on the question of entering into peace *pourparlers* with Germany. No real peace was possible until the military strength of Germany was broken. That accounts for the reluctance shown by the Allies to give a favourable response either to the Reichstag resolution, the Papal Note or the Kuhlmann overtures.

As the Allies had already stated their peace terms, it was thought desirable to leave to President Wilson the task of replying categorically to the Papal Note. The President was definitely of the opinion that the time had not yet arrived for peace negotiations, and that any peace attainable under present conditions would only mean a renewal of the conflict later on. As the blame for rejecting peace overtures has been attributed to the British Government, it is worth while reproducing President Wilson's reply in full:—

“Every heart that has not been blinded and hardened by this terrible war must be touched by this moving appeal of His Holiness the Pope, must feel the dignity and force of the humane and generous motives which prompted it, and must fervently wish that we might take the path of peace he so persuasively points out. But it would be folly to take it if it does not in fact lead to the goal he proposes. Our response must be based upon the stern facts and upon nothing else; it is not a mere cessation of arms he desires; it is a stable and enduring peace. This agony must not be gone through with again, and it must be a matter of very sober judgment what will ensure us against it.

His Holiness in substance proposes that we return to the *status quo ante bellum*, and that then there can be a general condonation, disarmament, and a concert of nations based upon an acceptance of the principle of arbitration; that by a similar concert freedom of the seas be established; and that the territorial claims of France and Italy, the perplexing problems of the Balkan States, and the restitution of Poland be left to such conciliatory adjustments as may be possible in the new temper of such a peace, due regard being paid to the aspirations of the peoples whose political fortunes and affiliations will be involved.

It is manifest that no part of this programme can be successfully carried out unless the restitution of the *status quo ante* furnishes a firm and satisfactory basis for it. The object of this war is to deliver the free peoples of the world from the menace and the actual power of a vast military establishment controlled by an irresponsible Government which, having secretly planned to



dominate the world, proceeded to carry the plan out without regard either to the sacred obligations of treaty or the long-established practices and long-cherished principles of international action and honour; which chose its own time for the war; delivered its blow fiercely and suddenly; stopped at no barrier either of law or of mercy; swept a whole continent within the tide of blood, not the blood of soldiers only, but the blood of innocent women and children also, and of the helpless poor; and now stands balked, but not defeated, the enemy of four-fifths of the world. This power is not the German people. It is the ruthless master of the German people. It is no business of ours how that great people came under its control or submitted to its temporary zest, to the domination of its purpose; but it is our business to see to it that the history of the rest of the world is no longer left to its handling.

To deal with such a power by way of peace upon the plan proposed by His Holiness the Pope would, so far as we can see, involve a recuperation of the strength and renewal of the policy; would make it necessary to create a permanent hostile combination of the nations against the German people, who are its instruments; would result in abandoning the new-born Russia to the intrigue, the manifold subtle interference, and the certain counter-revolution, which would be attempted by all the malign influences to which the German Government has of late accustomed the world. Can peace be based upon a restitution of its power or upon any word of honour it could pledge in a treaty of settlement and accommodation?

Responsible statesmen must now everywhere see, if they never saw before, that no peace can rest securely upon political or economic restrictions meant to benefit some nations and cripple or embarrass others, upon vindictive action of any sort, or any kind of revenge or deliberate injury. The American people have suffered intolerable wrongs at the hands of the Imperial German Government, but they desire no reprisal upon the German people, who have themselves suffered all things in this war which they did not choose. They believe that peace should rest upon the rights of peoples, not the rights of governments, the rights of peoples, great and small, weak or powerful, their equal right to freedom and security and self-government, and to a participation upon fair terms in the economic opportunities of the world, the German peoples of course, included, if they will accept equality and not seek domination.

The test, therefore, of every plan of peace is this: Is it based upon the faith of all the peoples involved, or merely upon the word of an ambitious and intriguing Government on the one hand and of a group of free peoples on the other? This is a test which goes to the root of the matter, and it is the test which must be applied.

The purposes of the United States in this war are known to the whole world—to every people to whom the truth has been permitted to come. They do not need to be stated again. We seek no material advantages of any kind. We believe that the intolerable wrongs done in this war by the furious and brutal power of the Imperial German Government ought to be repaired, but not at the expense of the sovereignty of any people—rather in vindication of the sovereignty both of those that are weak and of those that are strong. Punitive damages, the dismemberment of empires, the establishment of selfish and exclusive economic leagues, we deem inexpedient, and in the end worse than futile, no proper basis for a peace of any kind, least of all for an enduring peace. That must be based upon justice and fairness and the common rights of mankind.

We cannot take the word of the present rulers of Germany as a guarantee of anything that is to endure, unless explicitly supported by such conclusive evidence of the will and purpose of the German people themselves as the other peoples of the world would be justified in accepting. Without such guarantees, treaties of settlement, agreements for disarmament, covenants to set up arbitration in the place of force, territorial adjustments, reconstitutions of small nations, if made with the German Government, no man, no nation, could now depend on. We must await some new evidence of the purposes of the great peoples of the Central Empires. God grant it may be given soon, and in a way to restore the confidence of all peoples everywhere in the faith of the nations and the possibility of a covenanted peace.

ROBERT LANSING,

Secretary of State of the  
United States of America."

This reply put a definite termination to the Vatican efforts for peace. The "scrap of paper" had shattered confidence in German Imperialism. President Wilson, like the Asquith Government, came to the conclusion that its overthrow was a condition precedent to a durable peace.

The German reply to the Papal Note was not given until the 21st September. In spite of the Pope's explicit declaration that the complete restoration of Belgian independence was a *sine qua non*, the German answer contained no reference to Belgium. That reply caused profound disappointment even amongst the Germanophiles of the Continent. It was said that the Giolittians in Italy were "almost angry," while the clerical papers did not hesitate to manifest their disappointment or discouragement. In Vatican circles the sterility of the reply was attributed to the fact that the answer of the Central Empires had been completely reconstructed since the taking of Riga.

(The German army leaders by this date were so confident that they could finally repel the British attack on Flanders that they organised an advance in Russia which ended in the capture of the important port of Riga.) We know now what took place in official circles in Germany between the date of the Reichstag resolution and their reply to the Papal Note. The facts have been revealed by the ex-Chancellor, Dr. Michaelis, and by General Ludendorff. Our Ambassador to the Papal See seems to have talked to Cardinal Gasparri as to the importance of securing a definite declaration from the German Government as to its intentions with regard to the complete independence of Belgium, and the compensation to be made to her for the damage done by the War. The French Government associated themselves with this communication, which was passed on to Chancellor Michaelis by the Papal Nuncio at Munich. On the strength of this message the Chancellor seems to have arranged a Crown Council with the Kaiser and the Chiefs of the Army and Navy on 11th September. After a good deal of discussion, in which the Army Chiefs put forward extreme demands, the result of the conference was summarised in the following form, written and signed by the Kaiser in his own hand:—

“The annexation of Belgium would be a mistake. Belgium can be restored. The Flemish coast is certainly very important and Zeebrugge cannot be allowed to fall into English hands. But the Belgian coast by itself cannot be kept. There must be a close economic association of Belgium with Germany. Belgium herself has the greatest interest in that.”\*

As there was considerable ambiguity in this short Note, General Ludendorff three days later sent a memorandum to the Chancellor setting forth at considerable length his views on the peace terms which ought to be insisted upon. He summarises his demands in the following memorandum. He indicates in a footnote that the terms he sets out here were adopted. The memorandum has special importance because the Army Headquarters exercised much greater influence and authority on the general policy of their Government in Germany than in any other belligerent country. When the British Imperial War Cabinet discussed the terms of peace they did not call the Army or Navy chiefs into consultation. Nor did the French Government. But in Germany the position was entirely different. The German Chancellor and his colleagues would not dare to formulate conditions of peace without first of all submitting them to Hindenburg and Ludendorff and obtaining their approval. The reason is obvious. Neither the French nor the British Generals could flourish in the face of their respective governments such a dazzling array of crashing victories as those which the German Generals could compile. They

\* “The General Staff and Its Problems,” General Ludendorff, Vol. II, p. 489.



marched into any conference with Ministers through an Arc de Triomphe as crowded with the names of battles they won as that which Napoleon erected for himself. Incidentally, the memorandum has also its historical value from the point of view not only of understanding what were the German ideas of the appropriate peace terms, but also as a revelation of the view of the Army chiefs as to the military position:—

“At the conferences in Berlin our position and that of our enemies has been under discussion. I regard it as my duty to return once more to this subject and set down in writing the line of reasoning I adopted. I have extended it here with regard to Longwy and Briey, agriculture and maritime trade.

Judging by the reports of the departmental representatives our home situation is difficult in respect of fodder and coal; in the latter case, unfortunately, omissions in earlier months are partly responsible. Our financial system is extremely strained. Thanks to the Reichstag majority our domestic situation has become very unsatisfactory. The labour, and therefore the recruiting questions have become even more difficult. Yet I think that these internal difficulties may be overcome by the firm control of the present Government. It is quite possible.

As I will now explain in greater detail, Austria-Hungary is firmly bound to us for the next few months. Even Bulgaria will be more conciliatory when the French have won local successes west of Lake Ochrida. We are always sure of the Turks. I need say nothing more to show that our military position is secure and that the U-boat campaign is producing its effects.

On the other hand, the position of the Entente is considerably worse.

Russia is tending even more obviously towards internal dissolution. She thus progressively falls out as an effective enemy. Her internal conditions must undoubtedly produce a food and fuel crisis in the winter. This situation will react on Roumania. Affairs in the East have taken a turn which is very favourable for us. The other Entente Powers can no longer fully rely on Russia and Roumania. Our alliance has nothing similar to show.

Italy is apparently reckoning on a victory in the twelfth Isonzo battle. It will be denied her. The internal situation will then tend to precipitate a crisis. The coal shortage must be very great.

It is not to be believed that the new ministry in France will be permanently more bellicose than its predecessor. We may anticipate the contrary. France, too, is faced with a coal crisis.

All recent reports from England agree that the U-boat campaign is effective, the food situation is serious, and the English Government has to contend with great social difficulties. The pressure

for peace is becoming stronger. I need go no further into this matter. If England took really serious steps it would be a sign that she no longer believed she could win. It is no long step from that to the conviction that she might lose.

Since Russia's downfall, America has become the hope of the Entente. Although she is not to be under-estimated, she must not be over-estimated. At the moment England seems to be afraid that the leadership of the Entente will pass to America.

We need not stop to discuss what are her relations with Italy and her other allies, but it is certain that there is great friction between the members of the Entente.

So far the year 1917 has not brought the Entente great military successes. England has only won Mesopotamia. The great victories on land and at sea (U-boats) have been on our side.

I draw the following conclusions:—

Our military situation is more favourable than that of the Entente. Our alliance is firmer. Our internal difficulties are less than those of the Entente.

Yet, notwithstanding all this, I am of opinion that it is desirable that we should try to get a peace before the winter sets in, so long as it brings us those essentials which we need to secure our economic position hereafter and gives us an economic and military position which allows us to face another war of defence without anxiety.

The sources of our economic and military powers of resistance are to be found—apart from the Army and Navy—in our agriculture, our mineral wealth and our highly-developed industry.

Without Roumania and the other occupied areas, we should have been in a critical position with regard to food. Even with Roumania it has been serious enough. It would become still more acute if, as we must anticipate later, we had to feed Belgium. At the moment we are quite unable to do so. *We must, therefore, have an increase of territory. That territory can only be found in Courland and Lithuania which offer good agricultural opportunities.* In view of the attitude of Poland and for military reasons, we must fix the frontier of Lithuania to the south of Grodno and somewhat enlarge East and West Prussia. *Only thus shall we protect Prussia. Moreover, from a military point of view the frontier is too unfavourable at various points in the province of Posen.*

*Whether we shall attract the other Baltic provinces through Courland must be left to subsequent political developments.*

I will only touch upon the question as to the favourable influence an improvement in the food situation would have on our relations with the neutral States. *Corn and potatoes are power, just like coal and iron.*

Our mineral wealth and our industries are located as unfavourably as possible—on the frontiers of the Empire. The Government

and the Reichstag realised the difficult situation of the Upper Silesian coal basin even before the War and increased and strengthened the fortresses there. That by itself is not enough. *We must protect Upper Silesia by annexing further areas also.* This would be facilitated by liquidating the enemy-owned mines there and transferring them into German possession.

In the west we have the two great centres of the Lorraine-Luxemburg ore fields with the Saar basin and the lower Rhenish-Westphalian industrial area which tends to extend more and more along the Belgian and Dutch frontiers. These areas have not been in danger during this War, owing to the fact that we got the start of the Entente in our strategic deployment. Besides, the importance of the industrial areas was certainly not fully realised at the beginning of the War. But there is no doubt now—and we must take the fact into account—that our enemies will do everything they can to injure us in these areas. If they should succeed we should not be in a position to conduct a war of defence. We should also be in a hopeless position economically. There is no need to discuss the consequences to our domestic situation.

The unconditional protection of these two areas is a matter of life and death for us. *We must get everything we possibly can and which our position justifies. If we do not do so, our position will always be a subject of the greatest anxiety to us, and it would be better to go on fighting and not even think of peace.* We must be quite clear that what we fail to get will have to be made good in peace by heavy military expenditure (aerial defences, the maintenance of an aerial force, a formidable system of frontier defences), so far as it can be made good.

*The Lorraine iron basin demands a protective belt on the west. The wider it is, the easier will it be to secure that protection. If we kept the frontiers we had before the War, it would mean that every political excitement would affect the mines and the great body of labour employed there.* As soon as hostilities began the works would be paralysed and exposed to destruction. Moreover, there are mines in the strips of territory we should aim at securing. The annexation of this area would also enable us to be more economical with our own ore. As the German production of ore is unfortunately somewhat limited, this point is not immaterial. But first and foremost the areas we must secure will give us a guarantee that the mines now in German possession will work even in war if they have direct military protection.

It is obvious that the region will still be exposed to great danger from artillery and aviators and will make strong defensive measures necessary, as we cannot advance our frontiers there to the Meuse.

All the more essential is it that the lower Rhenish-Westphalian area should be made inviolable. What the Flemish coast is to



England from the point of view of air attacks on that country, the line of the Meuse at Liège is for the industrial area, though in an even higher degree. *We must control the region on both sides of the Meuse and south as far as St. Vith. Hitherto, the only method of securing this aim has seemed to me the incorporation of the area in the German Empire. I must leave the question whether there is any other method to others. I have not yet succeeded in finding one.*

The possession of the Meuse line by itself is not enough to give the industrial area the security it requires. *We must keep an Anglo-Franco-Belgian army even further away. That can only be secured by binding Belgium so closely to us economically that she will seek political union also.* The economic association will not be realised without strong military pressure—a considerable period of occupation—and without our possessing Liège. *The neutrality of Belgium is a phantom on which no practical reliance can be placed.*

We should only be absolutely safe, especially if the Dover-Calais tunnel scheme materialised, if we were in military occupation of the whole of Belgium and held the coast of Flanders. In spite of all England's difficulties, that cannot at the moment be achieved.

The question is whether we ought to continue the War until we reach that goal. In my opinion it is our duty to do so if England retains any territory in France (Calais). If she does not do so the occupation of the Flemish coast would be no reason for us to continue the War through the winter.

We must look for other methods of producing those effects on England at which we aimed with our occupation of the Flemish coast. I consider that this is possible if Belgium is closely associated with the German Empire economically, divided into Walloon and Flemish areas, takes over her own defence against France and England in course of time, and has her own army and navy after the period of occupation comes to an end.

The association of Belgium with Germany will have as a result that Holland, if she pursues her obvious interests, will be attracted to us, especially if her colonial possessions are guaranteed by a Japan which is allied to us. In that way we shall reach another part of the coast of the continent which faces England, and realise the aim for which the navy is even now striving, justly recognising its importance. *We shall have a position with regard to England which will enable us to keep our trade going in the next war. That is the third great object which we must always keep in mind.*

To this aspect of affairs belong, besides Russia, *points d'appui overseas in South America, a colonial empire in Africa and naval stations in or outside the colonial empire.* At the very moment when we are abandoning the Flemish coast the navy has a special claim by way of compensation to *points d'appui*—the Imperial Chancellor has himself expressly said so—which will enable it in

*the next war to keep the way to the world seas open to Germany and thereby secure her imports from abroad.* The greater our failure to achieve this aim, the larger must be the stocks of raw material which we shall have to accumulate, getting no return, in Germany.

I need only mention that a favourable commercial treaty with Denmark closely associated with us would increase our maritime strength and freedom of trade enormously.

LUDENDORFF.\*

14th September, 1917."

The footnote gives an idea of the conditions of peace which would be imposed at this date by Austria-Hungary:—

- "(1) Integrity of the Monarchy.
- (2) Slight improvements in the frontier against Russia.
- (3) Strategic rectifications of frontier against Roumania (Iron Gate, and eventually the Bistrica valley).
- (4) Restoration of the Kingdom of Serbia, though it must surrender the areas promised to Bulgaria, the Albanian portions to Albania, the Matschwa from Belgrade. With a view to satisfying Bulgaria, Baron Burian will eventually concede still more territory to that country. The rest of restored Serbia shall be joined in close economic association with Austria.
- (5) Restoration of the Kingdom of Montenegro, which will surrender certain areas to Austria-Hungary and Albania.
- (6) Independence of Albania under Austro-Hungarian protection.
- (7) Strategic rectifications of frontier against Italy. (Certain barren and mountainous districts.)"

These arrogant documents were written by Ludendorff at a time when Sir Douglas Haig was assuring us that the German Army was crumbling under his terrible onset in Flanders.

The Army policy in Germany was definitely expansionist in the West as well as the East. It may be said that this memorandum simply represented the extravagant demands put forward by the military, but the military were definitely on top and the fact must not be overlooked that the Germans were in actual occupation of the territories they contemplated annexing and of a good deal more. A letter written by Michaelis the day after the conference shows that in so far as Belgium is concerned, there was no substantial difference between him and General Headquarters. As to annexations on the Eastern frontier, soldier and civilian were in complete accord. Such difficulties as existed had reference to expansion on the Western

\* "The General Staff and Its Problems," by General Ludendorff, pp. 491-5

Front. This is what Michaelis wrote on the 12th September, to the Army Chiefs:—

“After the conclusion of yesterday’s conference under His Majesty’s Presidency, I felt myself compelled to give you and General Ludendorff my thanks for having supported me in so far-sighted a manner, and by no means from the purely military standpoint alone, in keeping our war aims within bounds in expectation of soon entering into negotiations, either in the autumn or spring.

I take it that the demands of Main Headquarters, demands on which you think there should be no weakening, mean that you both claim Liège and a protective belt for the safety of our western industrial area; that you both hope that as a result of the close economic association of Belgium with Germany, a situation will arise which, on purely egotistical economic grounds, will make it impossible for her to have military differences with us, so that when everything has been done in Belgium which can be demanded by us for the purpose of safeguarding the economic bond—and of course that will take several years from the time of the first negotiations—military safeguards can be allowed to lapse. Liège and so forth would therefore be demanded as a security for a limited period only.

I now want to make Your Excellency an urgent request that when the expected visitors reach Headquarters, especially the visitors who belong to the annexationist school (for instance, I myself had to recommend Count Westarp to take a trip to Austria!) and who, knowing little about events among our allies, are thus inclined to regard a peace on the principles indicated with regard to Belgium as a bad one, you will inform them of your views so that extreme ambitions may be checked. We must show them what the enemy’s intentions were with regard to us and what we have actually obtained—instead of destruction and dismemberment, intact frontiers in the West and a certain prospect of using the raw material in the occupied areas; commercial and transport facilities by rail and water; preferential treatment in the port of Antwerp; an influence over the Germanophile Flemish population; our neighbours themselves to bear the cost of the damage we have inflicted upon them; the destruction of English influence on the coast of Flanders and northern France, and the demand for the return of our colonies as an object of compromise!

The next part up to the end\* was not read by the Minister-President Bauer in his speech of 28th July, 1919. The result was that the sense of the answer was completely distorted.

In addition there is the fact that we gain enormously in power and influence in the East in political, economic and military matters.

\* i.e., the concluding section of Ludendorff’s memorandum.



Does this look like a 'starvation' or 'renunciation' peace? Who would dare to make another attack upon Germany, who has maintained herself victoriously on hostile soil three and four years against an immense superiority of numbers, and has only just given incomparable proof of her might in the furthest East?

No, our die-hards must possess their souls in peace! If we can bring peace to our poor, tormented people and the world on the lines set forth above, we should do so and not fight even a month longer for the sake of some naval station, however valuable. Please help in the work of enlightenment!

I maintain that if the whole of my letter had been read out the representatives of the Government would not have succeeded, even for a moment, in obtaining a certain measure of success with some of their electors in reproaching me for having irresponsibly rejected an 'offer of peace.'

MICHAELIS."

On 15th September, Field-Marshal von Hindenburg wrote a letter to the Chancellor which indicates clearly that the military had by no means modified the views they had expressed at the Crown Council:—

"In accordance with your Excellency's wish I will help in enlightening leading men on our intentions with regard to Belgium, intentions on which agreement has been reached among the authorities in anticipation of peace being reached this year. I do not conceal from myself that in the navy and many patriotic circles the evacuation of the Belgian coast will be regarded as a heavy blow, which will only become tolerable when the compensations materialise which Your Excellency also conceded to the navy. In agreement with General Ludendorff I think that the compensation should take the form of *points d'appui* within and without our colonial empire. I must add two points. *The economic union of Belgium with Germany will not be realised without pressure upon that country, even after the conclusion of peace.* An occupation of several years will serve the purpose, and in any case this would be necessary on military grounds while England and America are evacuating France. *The German holding of Liège must continue after the occupation, even if it lasts several years.* Its main purpose is the direct military protection of the lower Rhenish-Westphalian industrial areas. It is only when we are in occupation of Liège, and are and remain undisputed masters of the situation, that we can take the necessary military and administrative measures. *I am therefore bound to think that we could not leave Liège within any period that is ascertained or could be fixed in the treaty.*

VON HINDENBURG."

Anyone who after perusing this correspondence is still of opinion that a Peace Conference at this stage of the War would have led to any practical results must be a person in whom rooted partisanship completely strangles all judgment. It is evident that no German plenipotentiary would be allowed at such a Conference to append his signature to a document restoring the independence of Belgium unconditionally.

But German statesmanship was still anxious to entice the Allies into a Peace Conference at a moment so favourable to the Central Powers. It continued to pursue what was known as the Peace Strategy. The Allied offensive on the Eastern and South-Eastern Front had completely collapsed, and the French Army had retired for its rest cure after the failure of its offensive in the West. But America was arming, and Britain, in spite of Ludendorff's statement to the contrary, was beginning to grapple in earnest and effectively with the submarine menace. This might very well be Germany's best chance of securing an advantageous settlement. Her wisest leaders fully realised the position and were not prepared to throw away the chance. Von Bethmann-Hollweg, Michaelis, the Pope and the Emperor Karl having failed, the German Foreign Minister, von Kuhlmann, tried his hand. He was the ablest diplomat who had yet appeared on the scene. He was well and favourably known in England. He had been a counsellor of the German Embassy in London for years before the War and it was known that his influence with the German Foreign Office was greater than that of the Ambassadors whom he served. Those who came into contact with him believed that he was anxious for good relations between his country and ours. The outside public were, however, suspicious of him. They ascribed a certain sinister wiliness to him and thought he was engaged in a game of hoodwinking trustful Ministers and journalists. But of his ability as a diplomatist there can be no doubt. He had recently been appointed German Foreign Minister. He was not deluded by the confidence displayed by the General Staff as to the ultimate result of the War. He knew Britain well, her stubborn will, her confidence in her invincibility, her inexhaustible resources. He also knew America with her gigantic reserves of men, money and material. He therefore knew that this was the last chance for making a profitable settlement which would present itself to Germany. Had he been complete master of the situation in Germany, no one could tell what might have ensued. But he was not. He had the unstable Kaiser, the weak Michaelis, the stubborn and arrogant Great Headquarters of the Army, and the Prussian aristocracy to overcome before he could put through any settlement which had the slightest chance of acceptance by the Allies. He nevertheless made an attempt.

On the 18th September, our Ambassador in Spain was told by the Spanish Foreign Minister that he had heard: —

“from one of his own diplomatic representatives that the Government of Germany were desirous of making a communication to Britain in regard to a peace settlement. He assured us that Spain had no desire to intervene or take any part in the matter, but he could see no objection to passing on the news to me. He asked whether His Majesty’s Government would care to receive this suggestion from Germany, or would refuse all discussion of it? I told him that I could not say anything, but would send word to you and tell him what you replied. But I pointed out that the possibility of discussion depended on what the German proposals were and that they would have to be very different from those so far made in the German Press. The Minister could tell me that the message came from a very exalted personage, but would give no further particulars.”

At the time we were not told who “the exalted personage” was or how the communication came to the ears of the Spanish Minister. Since then we have ascertained that the source of the Minister’s information was Villalobar, the Spanish representative at Brussels. Later on I had the opportunity of reading the actual dispatches which passed between Brussels and Madrid, and as they tell the full story—a story which is full of dramatic as well as historical interest—I had better be given in the original words:—

“BRUSSELS TO MADRID, 9th September, 1917.

I think that I have told you that the German Foreign Minister Kuhlmann was my colleague for a long time in London, when he was Counsellor to the German Embassy and I held a similar position in that of His Majesty. We are united by bonds of friendship, loyalty, and sympathy, and on my congratulating him on his well-deserved promotion, he replied in terms of the most affectionate character. To-day Lancken has received a secret cipher telegram from him, stating that he greatly desires to speak to me, and that as he wants an extremely secret interview which could not take place either in Brussels or in Berlin, he would like me to travel to some other place in Belgium or to come to Cologne, where, as soon as I arrive in Germany, he promises to observe my most strict incognito while waiting for me. He says nothing further, but I suppose he wants to make some communication referring to peace which might be of interest to the King and his Government. He begs me to leave here on Monday 10th, and to send him a reply if I accept his proposal. As this compromises nobody and it might be advisable to accept, I am making arrangements for the journey, advising Your Excellency immediately, both because it is my duty to do so, and because you may have some special communication to make to me before I travel. I need scarcely add that whatever



its subject may be, I shall immediately telegraph to Your Excellency the substance of my conversation with Kuhlmann."

The following reply was sent by the Spanish Foreign Office: —

"MADRID TO BRUSSELS, 10th September, 1917.

I consider that the journey and interview proposed in the telegram received to-day are not in accordance with the interests of the public service, and I ask you to abstain from carrying out the project."

"BRUSSELS TO MADRID, 14th September, 1917.

Your reply to my telegram of the 8th did not reach this Legation till Wednesday evening a few hours before my return from Cologne; I went there on Monday, as I advised you, as I had not received any reply from you previous to my departure.

The interview which was absolutely private, and secret, and without any importance if Your Excellency regards it as inopportune, consisted in the following: —

The German Foreign Minister Kuhlmann told me that he proposed to reply to the Note of the Vatican in a moderate, courteous, and somewhat evasive manner, because, together with the official Note, Rome had communicated to him privately an official message from England, and had disclosed a telegram which Salis, the British Minister, had received from London asking, as was reasonable, what answer Germany proposed to make with regard to Belgium. Wherefore maintaining that it was to Germany's interests to speak firstly and principally with England, and, if possible to initiate conversations in this way before entering into negotiations, he proposed while sending an official reply to the official Note of the Vatican to state concerning the second Note that he had already initiated conversations (through another channel) and that he would reply later. For this reason he begged me to forward some indication of this through the British Minister at The Hague, and if the affair promised well, to make a pretext of giving details concerning the provisioning of Belgium and to go to London to speak of his projects regarding Belgium, which he told me would be in conformity with the aspirations of Great Britain. He repeated he desired to initiate preliminary peace conversations, in the first instance, with Great Britain if that were possible. He indicated that he asked this of *me*, because he knows me well, since I am communicating with him on other affairs of a general nature, and being aware of my friendship for England and my services to the Allies.

I replied that I was visiting him without the knowledge of Your Excellency or of the King and his Government, obeying the dictates

of pure friendship and previous comradeship, and that I could not do anything without the knowledge of my superiors, that however much I might desire to see my Sovereign the arbiter of the coming peace, I could not personally take part in negotiations of any kind without the orders of my superiors, even though Belgian affairs are in question and I have been discussing with him other matters of a general character relative to the Service without instructions.

He replied that he quite understood my position, and that since the favour which he asked of me was a partly private one, reducing itself to discovering whether on a basis which must be agreeable to England, the latter were willing, before entering upon official negotiations, to hold a conversation which would compromise nobody and to discovering this in an absolutely confidential and secret manner, he would assist me to avoid any embarrassment, and he went so far as to tell me that if the conversation which he desired me to initiate in Holland and in England should not prove successful, I could deny all intervention on the part of my Government in order not to compromise it, while according to my judgment and pleasure, I could make it appear that I had intervened, naturally with your permission, where I saw that certain results were to be obtained. He told me that, assuming that what he knew from Rome was official, and taking into consideration the extent to which he was prepared to go to meet England, he thought the negotiations might proceed, and that in the case he strongly desired that the Spanish Government should not be excluded from the peace negotiations, if peace, as he hoped, were to result from the steps taken by Rome. I replied that I would disclose my interview with him to you, adding that I knew nothing about his projects regarding peace negotiations, nor about the intentions of the Spanish Government on these points but that I would give him an answer as to whether I could interest myself in the affair or not; I repeated that I was not authorised to take part in this interview, to which I had consented only out of personal friendship.

*My personal impression is, and naturally this is included in the absolute secrecy to which I am bound by the confidence which he showed me in the rest of his conversation, that Germany appears inclined to propose a peace which would meet the greater part of the Allies' desires, and especially those of England regarding the independence of Belgium and other matters which are of interest to Great Britain.* I regret that I did not receive your telegram before, since naturally, I should have refused the interview to which I consented, as I took the non-arrival of your expected telegram for consent. In view of Your Excellency's reply, I shall refuse, or withdraw from the affair. Kuhlmann agreed that if Your Excellency authorised me to make private representations he would either give me further details through Baron Lancken or

would come himself to some point in Belgium other than Brussels, in order to see me; he begged me to answer with all urgency since if he could not reply by means of me to the official indications alluded to, he would do it through another agency (which he indicated to me was not far removed from Holland). I shall be much grieved if the proceeding in any way inconveniences Your Excellency, but I have long been disposed to sacrifice my personal position, which Your Excellency may dispose of in any way that is most advantageous to the service of the King and his Government. I earnestly beg you to transmit such orders as Your Excellency may consider appropriate.

I feel that before receiving your telegram I had no reason to avoid the interview, which in any case would have been futile, since Kuhlmann could equally well have come to Brussels and have visited me, and I could not have shut the door of the Legation in his face.

What he asked of me does not appear to compromise or trouble anyone; because one may say so and withdraw without danger and without result.

Provided that the fact of the official English communication is certain, there may be an opportunity for the intervention of His Majesty, which in that case would be opportune.

Please give me fresh instructions and believe that I much regret not receiving the previous instructions in time, if the conversation I have reported proves in any way inconvenient to Your Excellency."

"BRUSSELS TO MADRID, 18th September, 1917.

Baron Lancken has just returned from Berlin, to which place he was urgently summoned, and has asked me very confidentially, on the instructions of the German Foreign Minister, whether I have received any reply to my telegrams. I replied that I was expecting an answer and he added that they desired that I should at least obtain permission to 'sound' my English colleague at The Hague, for in view of the close relations which I maintain with him in connection with the Relief of Belgium, no particular significance would be attached to a conversation between him and myself on this subject. He also gave me a private hint that if an absolutely private and secret conversation could be brought about between a German and an English diplomatist, without in any way implying peace negotiations, they were confident of being able to settle the matter, and for this reason desired to know without delay if I could take this step. *In that case they will disclose all the aspirations of Germany, and the concessions which she is willing to make, without thereby implying any negotiation; otherwise they will act through another channel.*



They count in any case on our absolute discretion, which I promised, although I would promise nothing further without previous orders from you. Baron Lancken also told me that he intended to go to The Hague before long, and added confidentially that he would afterwards go to Switzerland, where he was to see someone from Paris.

I am reporting all I know, because I consider it fitting that Your Excellency should be informed, although in absolute secrecy of what appears to be the nucleus of an effort to secure a settlement, and if this effort comes to nothing, my silence will not in any way prejudice the interests of the Service. But I omit all personal comments as long as I cannot count on the complete approval and further order of Your Excellency."

"BRUSSELS TO MADRID, 19th September, 1917.

*Personal and Very Private.*

I have just received your telegram. You are perfectly right in regard to the difficulty of your telegram arriving before my departure for Cologne, but, having no more time than that at my disposal, I thought it my duty, while informing you in any case, not to delay my journey and I still think that the text of my telegram indicated this; I relied further in any event on the confidence with which you have always been good enough to honour me and on the assurance that whatever might happen it was my duty to be careful not to compromise either Your Excellency or the Spanish Government, while considering it on the other hand my duty not to lose any opportunity likely to further the royal service.

I believe that I have in no respect compromised the Government, since, if you disapprove of the proposal made I can sacrifice my standing with my interlocutor in the manner which you may direct.

Referring to the latter part of your telegram and amplifying my telegram, I believe it wiser to gain time on the pretext of a delay in the telegrams than to speak of the necessity of thinking over the matter carefully, lest, in so delicate a matter, undue suspicions arise that we are consulting in other quarters; since I regard it of the highest importance that he should not doubt our good faith in view of the absolute confidence which my interlocutor has shown me.

The step which I am requested to take in The Hague at least, *should, I think, be granted*, since even in the event of non-acceptance it may be regarded as a favour to the other side if the approaches are made with the skill and tact which should not in any case be neglected.

I feel it my duty to inform you that in my opinion the desire and need for peace on the German side are so great that we must remember that the matter will be taken up through another

channel if we withdraw, an opportunity being thereby lost of advancing the interest of the King and our country.

I do not know whether Spain has been approached from other quarters or whether promises with regard to an intervention in favour of peace have been made by the other side, for which reason only Your Excellency's superior judgment can discern how far it is more expedient to take advantage of an offer from one or the other side or to bring together two such offers.

If I could have had a conversation with you I believe the difficulty could have been cleared up. At one time I thought of asking permission to travel to Spain, but the material lack of time, since I believe that events are moving fast, the secrecy of the negotiations and the need to avoid comments on my movements remove all possibility of such a conversation.

I await orders, trusting that Your Excellency will not forget my loyalty to the King and my zeal in your service."

"MADRID TO BRUSSELS, 19th September, 1917.

In reply to your telegram, I have to inform you that the matter is occupying my attention, and I hope to be able shortly to forward my instructions."

Although neither I nor any member of the Cabinet saw any of these telegrams that led up to the Spanish Government's communiqué, they felt that the communication itself was a matter of sufficient consequence to call for the most careful examination. Mr. Balfour's view of the matter was expressed in the memorandum he submitted to me on 20th September, which ran as follows:—

"SECRET.

#### PEACE NEGOTIATIONS.

From the Foreign Office point of view we have now reached the most critical and difficult stages of the War. When hostilities began, diplomatic relations between the belligerents were, of course, completely severed; when hostilities are over, the regular machinery of diplomacy will, of course, be re-established. But we are now in the middle stage, when fighting has lost none of its violence, when all the natural channels of diplomacy are still choked, but when, nevertheless, some, at least, of the belligerents are endeavouring to start informal conversations about terms of peace.

From Austria, Bulgaria, and Turkey, hesitating and inconclusive advances have thus been made to us and, I believe, to France also. But there is this significant difference between the case of Austria and the cases of Bulgaria and Turkey—in the case of Austria, the advances have come from the highest quarters in the established

Government—in the cases of Bulgaria and Turkey, on the other hand, the advances have been made on behalf of rebels, or would-be rebels, against the Powers that be.

Now would-be rebels are dangerous guides. They are apt to take too rosy a view of their powers and prospects. They have the sanguine enthusiasm of the gambler, and though they sometimes make a fortune they more commonly lose one. This consideration would naturally induce us to take the Austrian proposals more seriously than those of her two Eastern allies. But, on the other hand, all the indications appear to show that Austria is so tightly bound to Germany, that, *as things are at present*, she could do no more for the cause of peace than press moderation upon her arrogant partner. Whatever change in her attitude the coming winter and spring may produce, it seems more than doubtful whether *at the present moment* anything will induce Austria to break away from Germany.

The last to enter the diplomatic field is Germany.

A private telegram just received from Sir A. Hardinge, which I have circulated to the Cabinet, shows beyond question that the German Foreign Office is desirous of entering into conversations with the British Government; *probably* with a view of arriving at some basis of discussion as regards the terms of peace, *possibly* with the amiable purpose of sowing dissensions among the Entente Powers. Speaking generally, therefore, the situation is this:—

Representatives of the Opposition in Turkey and in Bulgaria have informed us that their respective countries are weary of the War, and that under certain conditions the Governments that are keeping them in the War could be overthrown. Austria, or, least, the Austrian Court, desires peace, but will not act without Germany. Germany has expressed her desire for a non-committal talk about terms of peace.

Clearly the last of these overtures is the most important. It is, moreover, the only one which has reached us through the orthodox channel of a neutral Foreign Office, and we must without delay consider what line we propose to adopt with regard to it.

I venture to lay down, if only for purposes of discussion, the following propositions:—

(1) We cannot ignore Kuhlmann's proposal. To do so would greatly help the pan-German forces at Berlin. It would also, I think, weaken the Government in Britain. It would tend to unite Germany in favour of the War and to disunite public opinion at home, which is quite ready vigorously to support the War, if war be necessary, but would shrink from anything which looked like an unreasonable determination to fight for fighting's sake.

(2) What we do must be done with the full knowledge of our Allies. I have little doubt that Kuhlmann would greatly prefer



that the conversations with the British Government which he desires should be kept secret, and he would desire this whatever be his motives in initiating this new policy. If his object is to make mischief between the Allied Powers his best course is evidently to carry on negotiations secretly until they have reached a stage which lends itself to misrepresentation, and then to betray them. If, on the other hand, as I am inclined to believe, he is genuinely anxious to find a basis for settlement, this end might well seem to him easier of attainment if he begins his diplomatic conversations with a dialogue rather than with a general debate.

It must be remembered that one of the most serious perils incident to all peace negotiations of the kind proposed is that they give a Power like Germany unique opportunity of sowing dissensions among its opponents. We need not fear, indeed, that any of the Allied Governments will prove willingly faithless: but, with the exception of Britain and America, they each have to deal with a public opinion which is moved in the main by national considerations. If, therefore, either France or Italy (for example) were offered *now* all, or more than all, that a successful war could ultimately give them, it might be exceedingly difficult for any Government to induce them to go on fighting for interests that were not their own.

I do not see any method of effectually parrying this danger. But our best chance is perfect frankness, and it seems therefore clear that we should do nothing without fully informing France, Italy, America, Russia and Japan. It is quite possible that if, and when, we communicate our intention to the Germans they may drop the whole matter. This does not, however, alter my opinion that we should lay ourselves dangerously open to misconception if we indulged in even the most non-committal conversations behind the backs of our friends.

I suggest, therefore, that the Cabinet should authorise me to call together the Allied Ambassadors and tell them that a neutral Power had informed us that Germany was desirous of entering into conversations with us on the subject of terms of peace, and that in our opinion it would be wise to listen to any proposals that she might have to make; it being clearly understood that we should at once communicate them to our Allies without in any way committing ourselves until the Allies had had an opportunity of fully considering them.

If this course be adopted in principle, we should have further to consider whether the sort of communication I have suggested should be made also to the smaller Powers, now very numerous, who have joined in the War on our side. I am, on the whole, against this course. Needful secrecy will be difficult enough in any case; but if all the States, European, Asiatic, and South

American, who have committed acts of war on Germany, are to be taken into our confidence, the proposal might as well, indeed much better, be proclaimed at Charing Cross. At all events a proclamation at Charing Cross would accurately represent the facts.

However this may be, I cannot believe the Germans would ever consent to this degree of publicity. I doubt whether they will consent even to our communicating their proposals to the great Powers of the Entente; but this we must risk. Indeed, if I am to speak my whole mind, I am by no means sure that a refusal on their part to proceed further in the matter—and on such a ground—would not, *at the moment*, be the best thing that could happen to us.

A. J. BALFOUR.

Foreign Office,  
20th September, 1917."

At the time this document was received I was taking a short holiday down in Wales, and it was forwarded to me there. I also received at the same time the following letter from Mr. Bonar Law:—

"11, Downing Street,  
Whitehall, S.W.  
21st September, 1917.

My dear L.G.,

I think we can hardly take any action till we know (perhaps you do now) what happened with Painlevé's negotiations with Austria, and in any case I do not feel sure that it might not be right, with the approval of Painlevé, to invite the Germans to indicate what they mean without consulting all the other Allies. I feel sure, however, that this is too important to be dealt with at all or even considered by the Cabinet till you have considered it.

Possibly you may think it worth while to send a message to Painlevé urging him to be here on Monday.

I am sorry to urge you to shorten your holiday, which no one ever needed more, but I do think that it is almost necessary that you should be back in time to consider this on Monday. I wonder what you think of the attack yesterday. It looks to me better than I expected. Haig's report is, so Robertson told us, that our casualties are slight, but I do not know what that means.

I have to take a new departure about Exchequer Bonds and wish your approval before doing it. The change will have to be announced to the Bankers on Wednesday.

Yours sincerely,

A. BONAR LAW."

I immediately returned to Town and the situation was discussed at a meeting of the Cabinet. By that time Mr. Balfour had ascertained that the Germans had also approached the French through their intermediary, von Lancken. With regard to him and his proposals, Mr. Balfour reported that this individual had been First Secretary to the German Embassy in Paris before the War, and had subsequently been sent to Belgium, where he was supposed to have played a somewhat sinister part in the Nurse Cavell affair. Under orders from von Kuhlmann, von Lancken had made approaches to M. Briand through a lady who was half-French and half-German and personally acquainted with M. Briand. This lady was asked to tell M. Briand that Germany was willing to make peace. M. Briand had quite properly communicated the information to M. Painlevé, who had forwarded it to Mr. Balfour through M. Cambon, the French Ambassador. The suggested terms were so favourable to the British and French as to arouse suspicion that their object must be sinister. They included the following terms:—

Cession of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany.

Restoration of Serbia.

Territorial concessions to Italy.

Colonial concessions to Great Britain.

Restoration of Belgium.

The significant feature, however, was that neither Russia nor Roumania were referred to. M. Cambon, so Mr. Balfour informed us, had expressed the apprehension that, if once it became known in France that the cession of Alsace-Lorraine was included in the offer, it would be very difficult to keep France in the War.

If Russia and Roumania thought that we were discussing a peace on these lines they would probably themselves make a separate peace at once.

Beyond the above no details had been given and the available information was absolutely vague. Moreover, this approach to the French was of an entirely informal character.

The approach to us, Mr. Balfour continued, was through a formal channel, having been sent by the British Ambassador at Madrid, who had himself received it from the Spanish Government, who had received it from Germany through official channels, it was said from a most exalted quarter. Mr. Balfour was quite confident that it constituted a genuine approach.

A discussion ensued as to the answer to be given to the Spanish Government. It was decided that I should go over to France immediately to see the French Premier, M. Painlevé, before coming to any final conclusion. The following day I met M. Painlevé at Boulogne.



According to a note taken at the time, I ascertained from the conversation with M. Painlevé that the German peace approach to France was serious. The suggestion was that M. Briand should meet in Switzerland either an ex-Chancellor, the present Chancellor, or some more exalted person. M. Painlevé had said that M. Briand had fluctuated somewhat in his reports of what terms the Germans were prepared to offer. At one moment he had said that they were willing to give up everything that the Allies desired in the West—e.g., Belgium and Alsace-Lorraine. Afterwards he had said that they were willing to *discuss* Alsace-Lorraine. One of the most serious considerations was that M. Briand was in favour of entering into this negotiation. M. Painlevé and M. Ribot, however, were both opposed to it. What M. Painlevé seemed to fear was not that the approach was not bona fide, but that it *was* bona fide. He evidently doubted whether France would continue fighting if it were known that the Germans had offered both nine-tenths of Alsace-Lorraine and the whole of Belgium. French Ministers took the same general view about the desirability or otherwise of peace *pourparlers* with Germany as we did—that it was undesirable to enter into any negotiations until the German military power was broken.

My views as to the policy we ought to adopt depended on the military prospects. There were obvious and multiplying indications that Russia could no longer be depended upon for effective military assistance. It looked as if she meant to go out of the War. I was anxious to have military opinion as to the effect of this defection, if it occurred before America was ready to take her place. Robertson, whom I consulted, was of the opinion that, if Russia collapsed, the chances of our achieving a military victory were gone. I decided to obtain the views of General Foch and Sir Douglas Haig. Foch, whom I met at Boulogne, did not accept Robertson's estimate of the position. I proceeded from Boulogne to our General Headquarters in France to place the matter before Sir Douglas Haig. He agreed with Foch's opinion. It detracted somewhat from the value of his opinion that he based it largely on the joyous arithmetic of the optimistic Charteris, which demonstrated beyond question that there were not many untattered German divisions left on the Western Front after our attack which had taken place in Flanders the day I arrived at G.H.Q., and that some of this miserable remnant was of inferior quality. Sir Douglas Haig promised to give me in writing his considered views as to the military position which would be created in the event of the complete elimination of Russia from the War.

When the promised document arrived it seemed to me to be more concerned with convincing the Cabinet of the importance of prosecuting the Passchendaele offensive and of guaranteeing to the Commander-in-Chief an unfailing supply of men to fill up casualties than it was with the problem which I submitted to him. He

repeatedly expressed the most complete confidence that if we fulfilled his requirements as to men the Germans would be defeated whether Russia went out of the War or not.

A few extracts from this inebriated document will be given in the Passchendaele chapter. It breathes the fumes of a confidence stimulated by the constant draughts of carefully distilled reports placed on the table of the Commander-in-Chief. One must bear in mind Ludendorff's survey of the military situation which I have already given. Neither Haig nor Ludendorff were consciously bragging. They both sincerely believed that their appreciations were well founded in irrefragable facts. Such is the intoxication produced by the unlimited power whose slightest expression carries death or mutilation to myriads.

Holding as he did this view of the military situation, Haig deprecated the alternative of "accepting an unsatisfactory peace" instead of maintaining our offensive:—

"It would mean not only the almost certain renewal of the War hereafter at a time of Germany's choosing, but the entire loss of the faith and respect of our Overseas Dominions, America, and our other allies, and indeed of the entire world, East and West. More, it would entail a loss of self-respect from which Great Britain could never recover. The effect on the 2,000,000 men in France, who have done so much and suffered so much, and who are so confident in their power to win, would be calamitous and immediate.

It would be better for the future of our race to fail in next year's offensive than to accept the enemy's terms now when after more than three years of splendid effort we have brought the German resistance so near the breaking point.

But I see no reason to apprehend failure. Everything goes to show that the power of endurance of Germany and her allies is so severely strained that the mere fact of our ability and evident determination to maintain the struggle to the end may suffice to turn the scale at any moment.

Even if they hold out till next year, and if our success in the field then is of a limited nature our enemies cannot possibly face a further prolongation of the War, with the full development of America's strength, which will then be developing, to be reckoned with."

The confidence of Foch in the certainty of victory next year was based on opinions formed in a calmer atmosphere than that of a great battle which had already lasted three months. It was for that reason more reliable and impressive. It confirmed the conviction I had already formed, that now the submarine peril was being mastered, a complete Allied triumph was assured notwithstanding the defection

of Russia. When the Cabinet discussions on the Kuhlmann proposals were resumed, the part I took was influenced by the fact that my conclusions as to the military prospects had been fortified by the highest military opinion.

It was decided to empower the Foreign Secretary to summon a meeting of the Ambassadors of France, America and Japan with the *Chargés d'Affaires* of Italy and Russia and to submit for their consideration the following reply to the German Government:—

“His Majesty's Government would be prepared to receive any communication that the German Government may desire to make to them relating to peace, and to discuss it with their Allies.”

This meeting was held on the 8th October.

The Allied representatives were in complete agreement with the views expressed in this telegram. It is significant of the French view that M. Cambon added:—

“that, in his opinion, it would be impossible to continue the War with vigour, or even to continue it at all, if the Powers once reached the stage of discussing terms round a table. It followed that, before this stage of ‘round-table discussions’ was reached, we must be fully assured that the main objects of the Allied efforts had already been secured.”

No reply was given by the German Government to this telegram, but the day after it was dispatched to Madrid and probably before it was received in Berlin, the famous “No, never” speech was delivered by von Kuhlmann, which showed that M. Briand had been completely misled by his informant as to the German attitude on Alsace-Lorraine:—

“. . . I think it proper to give a clear and firm statement of our attitude, since curiously enough there still seem to be misconceptions in this respect among our enemies, and even among one or other of our neutral friends.

*There is but one answer to the question, ‘Can Germany in any form make any concessions with regard to Alsace-Lorraine?’ The answer is: ‘No, never!’*

So long as a single German can hold a gun, the integrity of the territory handed down to us as a glorious inheritance by our forefathers *can never be the object of any negotiations or concessions*. I am sure that, whether on the Right or on the Left, you will stand for that with equal resoluteness and equal self-sacrifice.

I am not one of those who think that a candid statement of such a fact might be detrimental to the rise of a clear and sincere will for



peace. On the contrary, I think such a will can only prosper and be fruitful on the ground of absolute clearness. Therefore, I think it necessary to state emphatically with all possible conciseness and clearness, as against all other questions which have of late so markedly come to the fore in public discussion, and which have taken up so much space, that what we are fighting for and will fight for to the last drop of our blood, is not fantastic conquests, but, before all, the integrity of German soil. . . .”

Von Kuhlmann stated that “absolute clearness” was essential to the will for peace. But we could not help observing that whereas he left no doubt as to the decision of the Imperial Government of Germany on the question of Alsace-Lorraine, he refrained from making any statement about its intentions on the question of Belgium. This speech was regarded as a slamming of the door by Germany, but not before a glimpse had been given as to the designs of the men who mattered there. They disclaimed conquest, but all the same, they meant to extend the area of their dominion—economically, diplomatically and militarily. As far as considerable territories were concerned they avowed the intention to annex.

I believe Kuhlmann was genuinely desirous of restoring Belgium. He secured from the Crown Council a Minute which seemed to sanction that policy. He knew that restoration of Belgium was Britain's chief war aim. Both the British Premier and ex-Premier had categorically asked the German Government whether they were prepared to clear out of Belgium entirely and restore her independence in its full integrity. They were told by the Papal Nuncio that this was the matter to which the British attached the greatest importance. But no assurance was forthcoming to the Pope or to the Allies. Why? Kuhlmann knew that the moment he gave a categorical and unambiguous answer satisfactory to the Allies, Junkerdom would be in arms, and “the place he knew would know him no more.” He wished first of all to lure the Allies into a talk round the table and to play them one against the other. This would foster suspicion and perhaps dissension amongst the Allies, especially if Russia were included, as she must be, in the conclave. If the Conference failed, it would be known in Allied Countries that the Germans had “in principle” agreed to abandon Belgium. Thus Allied morale would be sapped. As a war aim the manœuvre might have been considered by some to be legitimate and would no doubt have been effective. Kuhlmann may have been genuinely anxious for peace, and I think he was, for he realised his country's peril better than the Generals. But the latter, I am convinced, only consented for tactical reasons to this peace feeler, which they never ceased to regard as risky. They viewed it with a greater measure of apprehension than they did the Flanders offensive.

In reading Ludendorff's war books, one can see that Army Headquarters tolerated these overtures merely as a diplomatic offensive to divide and weaken the enemy. In fact, it was known as the "peace offensive." No Government in Germany was strong enough to defy these heroes of a hundred victories.

With such men in authority, could the Allies have made peace in 1917? Yes, of a kind. So they could have in 1916.

Would Belgium have been restored? Perhaps—probably, on terms. Amongst those terms would certainly have been the surrender of Liège and the Congo, with the imposition of economic and military conditions in what was left of Belgium, and an addition to German territory in the Baltic. Poland might have been granted autonomy under the protection of Germany, after a further slice of its territory had been cut out of the Russian provinces. Alsace-Lorraine would have remained German. The Briey iron mines of France would have come under German control. Germany would have had her colonies restored to her. What would have happened to Italy? She might have been given a few slices of Italia Irredenta on the condition that Austria had a liberal equivalent in Russia and Roumania. German military prowess would have been higher than ever. The terror inspired by her redoubtable army would have been deeper. Would Germany have scrapped that powerful army in the interests of world peace and security? Has France dismantled her huge armaments? The man who thinks that Hindenburg and Ludendorff would have agreed to such a proposal then is fit only for a private nursing home. Having through years of sacrifice achieved a greater Germany they would not have thrown away the formidable military organisation that had won it for the Fatherland. If they or one of them were sincere in their acceptance of the theory of a conspiracy to destroy that Fatherland, would they break up the machine that had held all the conspirators at bay for three years and inflicted terrible punishment on them all on land and sea?

Turkey would have been persuaded to concede a spurious autonomy to the Arabs—as delusive as Abdul Hamid's "reforms" for Armenians. Bulgaria would have been rewarded for her services by chunks of Serbian and Roumanian territory. A suitable present would also have been found for Constantine. He had earned it and would not have been forgotten. What a peace as a result of cruel sacrifice! Too horrible to think of!

## CHAPTER LXIII

# THE CAMPAIGN OF THE MUD: PASSCHENDAELE

### 1. HOW THE PLANS WERE LAID

AND now we come to the battle which, with the Somme and Verdun, will always rank as the most gigantic, tenacious, grim, futile and bloody fights ever waged in the history of war. Each of these battles lasted for months. None of them attained the object for which they were fought. In each case it was obvious early in the struggle to every one who watched its course—except to those who were responsible for the strategic plan that wrought the grisly tragedy—that the goal would not be reached. Taken together they were responsible for the slaughter or mutilation of between 2,000,000 and 3,000,000 of brave men. The tale of these battles constitutes a trilogy illustrating the unquenchable heroism that will never accept defeat and the inexhaustible vanity that will never admit a mistake. It is the story of the million who would rather die than own themselves cowards—even to themselves—and also of the two or three individuals who would rather the million perish than that they as leaders should own—even to themselves—that they were blunderers. Hence the immortal renown and the ghastly notoriety of the Verdun, Somme and Passchendaele battlefields; the fame won by sustained valour unrivalled in the annals of war; the notoriety attained by a narrow and stubborn egotism, unsurpassed amongst the records of disaster wrought by human complacency.

Falkenhayn, Joffre, and Haig were trained soldiers who had worked hard to master their profession. But there is no profession where experience and training count less in comparison with judgment and flair. The intervals between great wars are fortunately so considerable, and in this age of restless invention the change in mechanism and therefore in methods is also so considerable and so rapid, that imagination, resource, initiative and flexibility are more essential to success in the vocation of the soldier than in any other.

The battle of the Flanders mud, better and more bitterly known as the Battle of Passchendaele, had been put into Sir Douglas Haig's tenacious brain as early as 1916. If it failed it was not for lack of the most elaborate and prolonged preparations. In July, 1917, he told the War Cabinet that he had been preparing for it the whole year. Meanwhile he was impatient of any other plan. The Chantilly\*

\* The Chantilly Conference of Generals was held on Nov. 15th, 1916.



proposals provided something for him to go on with, whilst he was completing his preparations for the real campaign of the year. The Nivelle "break-through" was a crude and inconvenient rival to the Flanders operation. The capture of the Messines Ridge, a perfect attack in its way, was just a useful little preliminary to the real campaign, an *apéritif* provided by General Plumer to stimulate the public appetite for the great carousal of victory which was being provided for us by G.H.Q.

The Commander-in-Chief had caught fire with this idea in 1916. G.H.Q. had been burning with it ever since and was now red-hot. Even the drenching rains of August and September could not put it out. Fire in peat can be quenched by continuous heavy rains, but not if the smouldering stack is completely under cover.

The sector of the enemy's front which it was intended to attack, and the objective which it was sought to attain, had been chosen by our military and naval advisers in the late autumn of 1916. It was to be an operation for clearing the coast of Flanders, as a minimum objective. There was also the prospect of a break-through which might end in "rolling" the Germans out of Belgium. Attrition was an afterthought of beaten Generals to explain away their defeat, and perhaps to extract some residue of credit out of a bad scheme badly handled.

Sir Eric Geddes received orders about December, 1916, to develop the transport arrangements by road and rail between all the ports on the North-East coast and our Flanders Front with a view to carrying great numbers of troops and vast quantities of material into that area. When he complained, in January, that he was short of 50,000 tons a week of material to carry out his orders, it was assumed by the War Cabinet that the urgency of his need for all that immense consignment of steel rails and road material was because he was being pressed by the Commander-in-Chief to perfect the arrangements for the spring offensive so as to enable the British Army to strike at the time indicated in the plan. It was discovered afterwards that most of the supply was required to make and improve roads and rails to bring up troops, ammunition, equipment and supplies for the Flanders attack in the late summer. He was given all the material and facilities he asked for. Never has there been a single battle staged with such tremendous and prolonged preparations. If therefore it failed, that failure is not attributable to any neglect to supply the High Command with all that was needful in the way of men, guns, tanks and ammunition to make and to sustain their attack, or to any lack of facilities for carrying these into the sphere of action. The despised civilians did all that could be expected from the wit, work and the devotion of man to make the plans of the military leaders a success—politicians, manufacturers, shippers, engineers, and most of all the humble civilians who were called up after a few months'

training to face the most terrible artillery and machine-guns in the world in order to carry out impossible orders issued by Generals who had no idea what the execution of their commands actually meant.

If there were delays the High Command were alone responsible for them. The Commander-in-Chief could have broken off the Arras attack at any time after the French had abandoned serious pressure on their front. That was in May. If therefore he did not commence his Flanders assault until practically August, it was not because he was delayed by any obligation to the French to persist in the Nivelles offensive. That had been virtually suspended three months before the first Passchendaele attack.

It is difficult and confusing to trace the origin of this adventure. The apologists of the High Command have been known to ascribe the blame in the first place to the Admiralty, who were making urgent appeals to the Government to capture the Flemish coast in order to destroy the submarine nests located at so short a distance from vital sea routes. It is suggested that Ministers succumbed to naval insistence, and according to Sir William Robertson informed him that "there was no measure to which the War Committee attached greater importance than the expulsion of the enemy from the Belgian coast and that arrangements should be made to include a plan of that nature in the operation of the following year."

The legend that politicians were responsible for constraining the High Command into the Passchendaele attack was revived in the late autumn, when it had become clear to the men engaged in actual operations that they were being called upon to undertake an impossible task. Brigadier-General Baker-Carr, who was associated at that time with the tanks in the battle area, in his interesting and revealing book, says: —

"To anyone familiar with the terrain in Flanders it was almost inconceivable that this part of the line should have been selected. If a careful search had been made from the English Channel to Switzerland, no more unsuitable spot could have been discovered. . . .

We were told, of course, that policy rather than strategy had dictated it *and that the C.-in-C. had been compelled, against his better judgment to accede to the desires of our civilian rulers.* . . .

Policy must usually dominate strategy, but on occasions circumstances will arise that render political desiderata impossible of attainment.

If there had ever been the most remote chance of achieving our ultimate purpose, viz. the capture of the ports used as submarine bases, no sacrifice would have been too great. But this remote chance never existed, even at the very commencement. . . ."

\* "From Chauffeur to Brigadier," by Brigadier-General Baker-Carr, Chapter XIV, p. 226 *et seq.*

By the time this statement was made to General Baker-Carr, G.H.Q. were becoming anxious to pass the responsibility for the whole of this insane enterprise on to other heads, either the politicians who constituted the Government in London, or the French, who were supposed to be urging it as a means of sparing their army. Both British Ministers and French Generals were strongly opposed to the undertaking, and conveyed their misgivings to the British Command.

I have carefully examined all the available documents in order to track down the originator or originators of this muddy and muddle-headed venture. The minutes and the memoranda which I shall quote later on will show clearly that I resisted to the very last the whole project before it was ever commenced, and confidently predicted its failure, giving reasons for my prediction. After its failure was beyond reasonable doubt I did my best to persuade the Generals to break it off. The only question therefore as far as my individual responsibility is concerned, is whether the initiation of this reckless enterprise can be laid at the door of the Asquith Government—of which I was a member. The Ostend scheme had been repeatedly discussed as a desirability or possibility, but always turned down by British and French as an impracticability. At the Chantilly Conference of Generals in November, 1916, which settled the outlines of the Allied campaign for 1917, nothing was said about a great Flanders offensive. Nor was it mentioned at the Paris Conference which ensued. But a fortnight later Sir William Robertson wrote the following letter to Marshal Joffre:—

“ 1st December, 1916.

My Dear General,

My Government has been viewing with some anxiety the increase of German naval activity on the coast of Belgium, which clearly has for its object the interruption of communications between Great Britain and France. It is undoubtedly the case that the German Navy is learning by experience, and that, owing to the facilities for raiding the Channel which the possession of Ostend and Zeebrugge affords the enemy, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ensure uninterrupted traffic.

The British Admiralty consider that we must be prepared for still greater activity and enterprise in this direction on the part of the Germans next year, and that if the enemy is left in possession of Ostend and Zeebrugge the threat to our communications may then be very serious. It is obvious that the maintenance of sea communication between Great Britain and France is vital to the successful conduct of the War on the Western Front, and in these circumstances my Government desire that the occupation of Ostend and Zeebrugge should form one of the objectives of the campaign next year.



I am accordingly instructing Sir Douglas Haig to place himself in communication with you *with a view to this operation being given a place in the general plans of operations for next year*, and to the necessary preparations being made to carry it out.

W. ROBERTSON.

Son Excellence

M. le Maréchal Joffre."

Why was Sir William Robertson in such a hurry to include this attack "in the general plans of operations for next year"? It had not been agreed to by the Cabinet. It had not even been thought out by the Staff at that date. Sir William Robertson saw that there were political changes pending. There was every prospect that men who were not strict communicants of the great Western Church—Mr. Bonar Law and I—might take command of affairs. The Government must therefore be committed in advance by a document which would have the validity of an Inter-Allied Military Convention. He was therefore in a hurry to incorporate the Flemish campaign in the Chantilly Pact.

In the minutes of the proceedings of the War Committee there is no record which would indicate that the question was ever even raised during the months of November or December. As it is not included in any of the minutes of that Committee, the letter must have been the result of some informal conversations between the Prime Minister and Sir John Jellicoe, and afterwards between Ministers. We were at the time very preoccupied with the submarine menace and the Admiralty despaired of coping with it by any naval methods. They were therefore anxious for a military advance along the Flemish coast which would capture harbours used as submarine bases mostly for the smaller craft. We decided to ask the military experts to consider the possibility of such an enterprise *and report to us*. That report never reached the Cabinet.

There is a draft letter addressed to the C.I.G.S. prepared for Mr. Asquith's signature by his direction. A personal note at the top of the draft states that:—

"It was prepared by direction of the Prime Minister for him to send to the C.I.G.S. as the result of a discussion, between the Cabinet Ministers forming the War Committee, on Monday afternoon, 20th November. Before it was sent, however, Sir William Robertson stated that the matter was to be discussed between General Sir Douglas Haig, the First Sea Lord and C.I.G.S. on Thursday afternoon, 23rd November. Consequently the Prime Minister decided not to send the letter. The draft, however, was sent to C.I.G.S. on 22nd November, for his information in connection with the forthcoming conference."

However, if the letter had been dispatched it contains no "instructions" for a military offensive in Flanders. Here is the unfinished and unsigned draft.

" 10, Downing Street,  
21st November, 1916.

After you had left the War Committee yesterday a very important discussion took place on the question of the submarine menace, and more particularly in regard to the protection of the routes through the Narrow Seas to France and Holland. The War Committee were absolutely unanimous on the very great desirability, if it is practicable, of some military action designed either to occupy Ostend and Zeebrugge, or at least to render those ports useless as bases for destroyers and submarines. There was no difference of opinion on the War Committee that the submarine constitutes by far the most dangerous menace to the Allies at the present and there appears no reason to doubt that the arrangements of the Admiralty for dealing with these craft, would be immensely facilitated if the enemy could be deprived of these bases.

The strain on the Admiralty in the protection of the essential routes in and about the Channel is at present very great, and locks up large numbers of craft that would otherwise be used to deal with the submarine in other waters. The provision of convoy for transports alone requires a great number of destroyers and the recent decision of the Army Council to bring home 7,000 men a day on leave has added materially to this burden. The provision of escort for the ships bringing food from Holland makes another serious drain on the resources of the Admiralty, and at present they are unable to provide more than one convoy a week for this highly important service. . . .

There is no operation of war to which the War Committee would attach greater importance than the successful occupation, or at least the deprivation to the enemy, of Ostend, and especially Zeebrugge.

I desire therefore that the General Staff and the Higher Command in France, in consultation with the Admiralty as necessary, *shall give the matter their closest attention and that you will report to me personally at an early date what action you consider feasible."*

Mr. Asquith left Office on the 7th December, and if a report was ever presented to him, nothing seems to have been decided by him. There was no further discussion on the subject in the Asquith War Committee, nor did the War Cabinet consider the project until June, 1917.

A plan of operations for a limited offensive in Flanders was submitted to Sir Douglas Haig by General Plumer, who was then

commanding the Second Army. This dealt exclusively with a projected attack on the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge—an old notion of General Plumer's. He planned it as an isolated operation to capture high ground to the east of Ypres, primarily in order to relieve the pressure on that fated town and salient. When the more ambitious project of an attack to capture the Passchendaele Ridge, Roulers and Thourout with a view to a converging attack on Ostend in order to clear the Belgian coast was suggested to him, he deprecated the proposal. He thought the ground unsuitable for such an attack and that it would be a prolonged and very costly operation. Headquarters tried to reassure him by suggesting that it afforded the chance of a surprise break-through.

The first document issued by G.H.Q. on the idea of a great Flanders offensive is very significant. I wish it had envisaged not merely the first, but also the final reaction of Headquarters upon the venture. It is signed by General Kiggell, the Chief of the General Staff in France.

“G.H.Q.,  
6th January, 1917.

*Second Army.*

With reference to your G.352, dated the 12th December, 1916, giving your plan for offensive operations north of the river Lys, the Commander-in-Chief desires me to draw your attention to the following points with a view to re-casting the plan.

1. The operations north of the river Lys will not take place until after the subsidiary British attacks elsewhere and main French offensive operations have been carried out. It is therefore to be anticipated that the enemy will have been severely handled and his reserves drawn away from your front before the attacks north of the Lys are launched.

*Under these circumstances it is essential that the plan should be based on rapid action and entail the breaking through of the enemy's defences on a wide front without any delay.*

2. *The plan, as submitted by you, indicates a sustained and deliberate offensive such as has been carried out recently on the SOMME Front. In these circumstances the enemy will have time to bring up fresh reinforcements and construct new lines of defence.*

3. The object of these operations is to inflict a decisive defeat on the enemy and to free the Belgian coast.

The immediate intention is to break through the enemy defensive systems on the approximate front HOOGE-STEENSTRAATE with the object of securing the line ROULERS-THOUROUT and, by advancing in a north-easterly direction, to threaten the coast defences in rear.



The Belgians and French will co-operate by attacking from DIXMUDE and NIEUPORT respectively.

4. The operations naturally divide themselves into two sectors and will be organised under two separate Army commands: —

(a) The attack on the MESSINE-WYTSCHAETE RIDGE and ZANDVOORDE, with the object of forming the defensive flank for the decisive attack, will be carried out by the Southern Army.

(b) The decisive attack, from the approximate front HOOGE-STEENSTRAATE with objective ROULERS and THOUROUT, will be executed by the Northern Army. *It is essential that this attack should be carried out with the least possible delay.* The Belgians will co-operate by attacking from DIXMUDE in the direction of CLERCKEN and ZARREN.

5. Will you please submit your plans by the 31st January, giving your recommendations as to how these operations should be carried out.

The scheme should include: —

(a) Your recommendations as to the point of junction between, and the areas allotted to, the two attacking armies.

(b) Your estimated requirements in divisions, guns, and tanks, assuming that a total of ten Corps Headquarters will be allotted for the operations.

(c) Any further railway construction you may consider necessary.

L. E. Kiggell, Lieut.-General,  
Chief of the General Staff."

On the 15th January, G.H.Q. sent the following note to the Second Army. —

*"Method of Execution of Attacks and Timings:—*

*The very great superiority in numbers, and it is hoped, in quality, of troops which we may reasonably anticipate, provides what must be the underlying idea of the operations, i.e., to break through the enemy's trench system and get to open fighting with the least possible delay so as to defeat the troops immediately available before they can be reinforced. The depth of the enemy's trench system is not so great as to preclude the hope of doing this were observation of the rear lines available. This lack of observation is undoubtedly the great obstacle to the achievement of a rapid break-through, and the most effective way of overcoming it is the employment of as large a number of tanks as is found possible as a result of the reconnaissance now being carried out."*

These documents were never shown to me or to any of my colleagues. The promised report on the project never materialised until the summer, although we had been committed by the incorporation of the project, without our knowledge, in the Chantilly plan of campaign for 1917.

It is very important to observe that at that date G.H.Q. in France laid down several essential conditions and criteria of success. (1) That there must be not only great but "very great" superiority in numbers and perhaps quality on our side; (2) That before the operation began the enemy should be drawn away from the British Front before the attacks north of the Lys were launched; (3) That it must be in the nature of a surprise to the enemy, that he shall not receive such notification of the impending attack as would enable him to bring up his reserves before the British Army could break through his lines of defence; (4) That it must be a clean breakthrough and not a grinding operation like that of the Somme; (5) That it was dependent on the employment of a large number of tanks as a means of overcoming difficulties. These were regarded by the High Command in January as conditions precedent to success.

When the attack was made later on, none of these conditions were possible or even contemplated. By July the whole character of the operation had been changed, and all the conditions which, in January, Sir Douglas Haig had stipulated as being essential to success, had been eliminated. Unfortunately, before these changes took place, "the plan" had been set up and enshrined at G.H.Q., and it became an impiety to doubt its infallibility.

Sir William Robertson always took the line that the Asquith Government had given him definite instructions to undertake a campaign for clearing the Flanders coast. It was his way of casting the responsibility for whatever happened on to the shoulders of others—preferably the politicians. That was one of the politician's utilities. He could find men, munitions and money for the Generals and take the blame for the way they were misspent.

It had been stipulated by the War Committee in 1916 that the military experts should report to them after they had concluded their examination of the idea of an operation to clear the Flemish coast. Such "instructions" as were given by the Asquith Government were orders to report. The fact that such a report was never submitted before June, 1917, may be due to the final plans not having been settled before that date. That, however, did not prevent preparations on the most tremendous scale being made from December onwards. They were revised and re-revised. Not one of the various plans or proposals was brought to the notice of the War Committee until June, 1917.

But even if it were conceivable (and it certainly is not) that my predecessor had, without any decisive consultation with his colleagues,

without giving them a hint of what he was doing, without any examination of the military possibilities, and not only without a plan, but without any preliminary survey of the ground by experts, given random instructions to the Chief of the Staff to undertake a vast campaign on the most unsuitable ground, circumstances had changed so completely since then that it was imperative that there should be a reconsideration of this rash enterprise. By the summer all the conditions of success laid down by the General Staff had disappeared. There were two outstanding events which had substantially modified the military position and made a great offensive by the Allies on the West a less feasible operation. The Russian Revolution and the grave trouble in the French Army had effected a complete metamorphosis in the possibilities of a great offensive against the Germans. The military power of our great Ally in the East was disintegrating. Russia could no longer be depended upon for effective attack. We were getting less assured day by day of her reliability and of her capacity for resistance, let alone attack. The Russian Revolution was saturated with pacifism. Its inspiration and most popular slogan was "Peace." The Russian peasants and workers passionately desired the fighting to be brought to an end. They were not particularly concerned about terms. They had endured enough sacrifice at the behest of incompetent authority. They did not mean to put up with it any longer. The pacifist spirit had permeated the trenches and it was a matter of considerable doubt whether the Russian troops could be relied upon to do any more serious and sustained fighting until the Revolution had settled down. Whether Russia would even then prosecute the War with increased vigour or patch up a separate peace, no one could foretell. The Germans knew the situation on that front better than anyone, for there were interchanges of civility between soldiers on both sides. But men who are under the influence of the revolutionary temper are uncertain in their action; one day friendly, the next day they may be ferocious. The Germans could not therefore feel quite certain that these fever-stricken warriors now resting quietly in the opposing trenches might not be seized with a sudden delirium, and if they did, whether they would turn on their old officers or fling themselves madly on their old foes. Consequently, until peace was concluded, the German High Command could not abandon their defences or attenuate their line beyond the margin of possibilities. But they were safe in permitting a considerable diminution in their full establishment on that front and in reducing the quality of their troops to a certain extent. Thus they could and did transfer some of the best and freshest to the Western Front and substitute for them divisions exhausted in great battles in the West without filling them up to full strength. Their best fighting material and their reserves were thus available for the West. The uncertainties of the Russian



situation were so great that it would be the height of imprudence to commit the British Army to a sustained offensive on the assumption that Russia could be relied upon effectively to hold up the Germans on the Eastern Front.

The Cabinet Committee on War Policy, which was engaged in a careful examination of the military position, drew the deduction from their review of the Russian situation that:—

(a) It would not be prudent to base our plans on any increase in the Russian military effort this year;

(b) The possibility could not be dismissed that Russia might refuse to continue the War through the coming winter, either because the Government insisted on making a separate peace, or because the soldiers refused to remain in the trenches.

A more disturbing element was the state of the French Army.

## CHAPTER LXIII (*continued*)

### THE CAMPAIGN OF THE MUD: PASSCHENDAELE

#### 2. THE CONDITION OF THE FRENCH ARMY AND CONSEQUENT CHANGE IN FRENCH STRATEGY

A FORTNIGHT after the Nivelle attack there was a perceptible slackening in the French offensive. This enabled the Germans to strengthen their forces opposite the British Army, which was pressing its attacks with an incessant and as we know now, with an insensate fury. The limit of possible victory had already been reached and neglected weeks ago. If the French for any reason had decided to ease off, they ought to have informed their Allies of their intention and of the cause. Their excuse is the confusion of counsel as between Chantilly and Paris which followed the great disappointment. At Sir Douglas Haig's pressing request I went over to Paris with him and Sir William Robertson to urge the French to keep up the attack on their section whilst we were, in accordance with the French plan, pressing the enemy on our sector. I met the French Ministers and General Pétain, who had virtually succeeded Nivelle as the head of the French Army. They offered no explanation of the sudden abatement of French effort. To all our appeals that the combined offensive should be continued, we received a favourable response from the Ministers. But Pétain was strangely reserved. When the committee adjourned he came to me in the corridor and in a half-chaffing tone he said: "I suppose you think I can't fight." I replied: "No, General, with your record I could not make that mistake, but I am certain that for some reason or other you won't fight." He did not answer, but passed it off with a good-humoured smile. My reply to General Pétain shows the impression that interview left on my mind.

As to the state of the French Army, the terrible strain it had undergone for three years—a continual stress of horror which was beyond human endurance—at last broke the discipline of the finest army ever sent to the battlefield by one of the most fearless and valiant races the world has ever seen. No race in Europe has engaged in more incessant fighting. Amongst the peoples of the earth none is more patriotic. Therefore no ordinary shock or infirmity of spirit would account for the sudden defection of French troops. For the first time for over three years there was a muffled crack in the indomitable

front presented by Frenchmen to their redoubtable foe. It was not the snap of pusillanimity, but of resentment. They were filled with righteous indignation at the way in which they had been mishandled by their leaders. They had been sent to face death when, owing to a variety of unexpected events, every counsel of prudence ought to have restrained their Commanders from giving the order.

It is true that they had lost more heavily and gained less in territory and captures of guns and prisoners in carrying out Joffre's hopeless offensives, but this time there were circumstances which differentiated their failure from all other attempts. It came at the end of a series of fatuous attacks of exactly the same kind, all repelled and all ending in appalling slaughter of devoted men. Survivors and substitutes had been assured over and over again by their Generals that this plan differed essentially from that which had been pursued and had ended in such futile massacres at Artois, Champagne, and the Somme. The same inducement was tendered to Lord Milner and myself by M. Briand at the Rome Conference when he urged us to accept the Nivelles offensive. M. Briand assured us that General Nivelles reported that the German forces had, to a considerable extent, been used up, and that they were not nearly so thick on the ground as they used to be. He pointed out that there was considerable difference between the character of the enemy's troops now and in the early part of the War. Formerly, all the enemy troops consisted of *troupes de choc*, but now only a portion of the enemy's forces could be regarded as such. Hence, in most parts of the line we should find rather mediocre troops opposed to us. Besides, the new offensive would be entirely different in method from those hitherto attempted. That was the solemn warranty of Nivelles and his Staff and we were all anxious to believe it. The soldiers who had to take the personal risks accepted the assurance in all confidence and it gave them renewed courage.

But as soon as the troops went over the top they found that they had to pass through exactly the same experiences as those to which they had been subjected in the discredited offensives of the past few years—machine-guns playing upon their crumbling ranks from positions which had not been touched by their artillery—a few kilometres of captured wilderness littered with dead and wounded comrades—a break-through as remote as ever—the enemy still entrenched behind a line of impregnable earthworks. That had happened before under Joffre. They were promised faithfully that it would never occur again—and here it had happened. Added to this is the fact that the actual losses, great as they were, were at first grossly exaggerated by apprehensive rumours, and that the arrangements for the wounded had been badly bungled. After the repulse the troops were at first just sullen and discontented, but there was no actual outbreak of insubordination. Gradually the disquieting



facts as to the conditions under which the offensive was launched percolated down to the trenches. It became known that there had been serious dissensions amongst the Generals before the attack; that some of the more experienced amongst them opposed the attack altogether, and predicted that in the circumstances success was impossible. It also became known that the plans had either by misadventure or treachery fallen into the hands of the enemy in time for him to readjust his dispositions for defence and that the High Command were fully cognisant of that fact, but that, nevertheless, they persisted in carrying out an operation the details of which were fully in the possession of their foes—and that without changing the tactics in any particular. The troops felt they had been fooled and sold and their comrades butchered. There was a wrangle of Generals which passed down through their Staffs to the fighting soldiers in the trenches. When politicians joined in the excited disputations and the rival strategies of these Generals became a political issue, the poor infantry, who were the designated victims of blundering generalship, felt that as they were immediately concerned they also had a right to take sides and to protest in their own way. Camps were placarded with notices declaring the intention of the soldiers to refuse to go back again to the trenches, whilst their fellows were earning 15 to 20 francs a day, working in safety in the factories. A battalion ordered to the front refused to proceed and dispersed into a wood. Soldiers coming home on leave sang the *Internationale* in the trains and demanded peace. Mutinies occurred in 16 different Army Corps, the mutineers alleging that they had been sacrificed by treacherous or inefficient Generals. A force of 15,000 Russians which had been sent to France to fight on the Western Front, openly revolted and had to be bombarded by artillery fire into surrender. A number of young infantrymen marched through the streets of a French town "baaing" like sheep to indicate that they were being driven like lambs to the slaughter. The ominous symptoms which preceded the Russian Revolution, and later on the German, appeared in the French Army in 1917. The French Government dealt promptly and prudently with a situation which, tactlessly handled, might have ended in a complete collapse of the French resistance. General Nivelle was dismissed and General Pétain, who was known to the troops to have opposed the peccant offensive, was made Commander-in-Chief. The measures he adopted to still the mutiny and to restore discipline to the French Army were a triumph of wise leadership. He took the soldiers into his confidence, talked to them, assured them there would be no more "great offensives" of the Somme and the Chemin des Dames types, and appealed to their patriotism to defend the integrity and security of the land they loved. He promised them relaxations in the matter of leave and improvements in their conditions behind the lines. These promises he took immediate steps to redeem. He

also administered final punishment to some of the leaders of the mutiny, but those upon whom sentence of death was actually carried out were comparatively few. By such means discipline was restored. The French Army, as it proved later on, was as capable as ever of defending French soil against attack by the enemy, but it was quite evident to any observer that it could not be depended upon to attempt any attacks on the German entrenchments on a grand scale—certainly not for some months to come. The French Army and the French nation, having suffered so severely owing to the swaggering garrulity of its High Command and of the host of soldiers and civilians who were given its indiscriminate confidence, now imposed a reticence and a secretiveness which effectively succeeded in withholding these disquieting incidents for some time, not only from their foes but also from their friends. For days after the outbreak, nothing was known outside the French military zone as to what had happened. Information on the subject was then imparted to our G.H.Q. The Germans never discovered the fact for weeks. Had they done so, they would certainly have taken steps to profit by the disaffection in the French lines in order to crumple up their most formidable military foe. When the news ultimately reached German Headquarters, great counter-attacks were launched upon the entrenchments captured by the French, but by that time French discipline, and to a large extent French morale, had been sufficiently restored for defensive purposes, and the attacks were repulsed with heavy losses.

The British Army was represented at French Headquarters by Sir Henry Wilson. British Ministers had no direct communication with him. Such news as he gathered was carefully filtered at the War Office ere it reached the Cabinet. We only saw such intelligence from the French side as was good for us to read. Our Ambassador was ill, so we were not kept fully posted through the Foreign Office. When I met Pétain in May he told me nothing of his trouble with the troops. Neither did French Ministers convey any hint of anxieties about the state of the Army. French and British Generals had a professional loyalty to each other which prevented them from giving any information to the politicians of either country which the soldiers of that country were anxious to keep from their ears. We heard echoes of the chatter that filled the *estaminets* of France, but we were told not to listen to that pernicious gossip.

British Headquarters at home and in France carefully kept to themselves the information conveyed to them, and it did not reach the ears of British Ministers for some time after the Commander-in-Chief and Sir William Robertson had been acquainted with the facts. Even then the full extent of the mutiny was not known. And British G.H.Q. discredited the confidential information officially given to them by French G.H.Q., as it was accompanied by an intimation that the French Army could not be depended upon to undertake any

further great offensive operations until 1918. Our Generals affected to be convinced that the French were exaggerating the depth and dimensions of the trouble in order to pass the rest of the fighting on to the British Army until the Americans came in, or in order to induce the British Army to take up more of the line. This was an unfair and somewhat discreditable imputation against honourable men. Foch and Pétain were both men of staunch integrity, upright and straightforward in all their dealings. They were both opposed to the Flanders offensive on its merits and said so before it began. They never approved of it. All that Ministers knew apart from rumours was that there had been trouble in the French Army. How much was known by Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson? They certainly knew that General Pétain, the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, and General Foch, who was the chief military adviser of the French Government, after full consideration of all the factors of the situation, had completely changed the views held at Chantilly as to the Allied strategy on the Western Front during the year 1917, and that they were now in favour of waiting for the Americans, meanwhile confining Allied activities on the Western Front to limited offensives. But Sir Douglas Haig gave the impression to the War Committee that the French Generals still approved of the launching of a great campaign on the Flemish coast, which certainly could not be characterised as a limited offensive. That implication was not even approximately accurate, and our military advisers knew it. On that point the evidence is overwhelming.

What was the new plan which the French High Command had irrevocably decided upon with the full approval of their Government? It is set forth by M. Painlevé, who was then Minister of War, in his revealing book, "*Comment j'ai nommé Foch et Pétain.*" He glosses over the troubles in the French Army: patriotic Frenchmen ever since the mutinies have done their best to suppress the record of this weakness to which the intrepid spirit of French youth temporarily succumbed. There is no need for their reticence. The reputation of the Army that held Verdun against the overwhelming artillery of the Teuton, and for eight months, shell-hole by shell-hole, fought to retain every metre of the charred plateau in French hands, is too well established to be shaken by an outbreak due to just exasperation at the bungling use made of their valour by rash leadership. The fact remains that the dominant element in the change of policy was that the nerve of the troops was completely rattled, and that they could not be trusted for some months to carry out any military plan which would involve a sustained attack upon the German entrenchments in France.

M. Painlevé attributes the transformation in the strategic ideas of the French High Command to three facts: the unreliability of Russia, with the imminent prospect of a complete collapse on that



front, and the promise of the Americans to have a million men in the fighting line in France by the summer of 1918. As he puts it, "Russian power was waning from day to day and America was not with us." The third reason was the need for improving the equipment of the French Army before launching another extensive attack on the German fortresses. This last explanation of the change in the French military view as to the conditions of a successful offensive has a special interest now that we are considering the essentials of disarmament. It had a personal interest for me, as I was largely responsible for the artillery policy adopted by the British Army. I concentrated on heavy cannon of the howitzer type. The French took a different line.

A belated examination of the comparative strength of the rival armies on the Western Front had revealed to the French the fact that in numbers the Allied troops had only a slight superiority, whereas in guns of a heavy calibre, in bombing aeroplanes and in poison gas the enemy had a definite superiority.

Until the Battle of the Chemin des Dames enforced the warning of Verdun, the French were devoting far too much of their manufacturing strength to the output of ammunition, especially of the lighter kind, and too little to the manufacture of heavy guns. A curious vanity impelled them to build up pyramids of excessive ammunition, the sight and record of which gave great pleasure to Parliamentary Committees which love to feast on statistics. M. Albert Thomas, who knew his committee men well, gorged them with prodigious figures of output. He made them multi-millionaires with field-gun ammunition, but the priesthood of the *soixante-quinze* would not give him the opportunity, of which he was the man to make the best use, to manufacture in sufficient numbers the heavy guns and howitzers which, whilst they would have the effect of reducing the number of the output, would have raised the French artillery to an equality in power with the Germans. The fact of German superiority in this respect had been either unknown to both the British and French High Commands or carefully withheld by them from their respective Governments. Why should they have done so? Was it that the Army leaders had not yet fully comprehended the extent to which this was a war of machinery? Or was it because men with a plan, in their eagerness to try it, are apt to overlook facts that do not fit in with its execution, and these men knew that a revelation of Allied inferiority in equipment on the Western Front would have led to a postponement of their offensive?

Joffre, during the Battle of the Somme, had his attention called to the French weakness in howitzers, and his visit to me at Cavan's Headquarters in September, 1916, was prompted by a desire to secure 50 of our six-inch howitzers for use on the French Front. But they were utterly inadequate to make up the deficiency.

It had been assumed that the disparity discovered during the Battle of Verdun between the German and French heavy calibres had since been made up. The inquiries instituted after the Chemin des Dames revealed the disquieting fact that the German heavy artillery was still superior. That had something to do with damping down the eagerness for attack, which constituted the main impulse of French strategical teaching. Both Pétain and Foch were now, according to M. Painlevé, "in view of the state of their divisions, denouncing the dangerous folly of a great general offensive, a few months after that of 16th April," and M. Painlevé adds significantly that France "should be grateful to her two great commanders who, by their resolute patience, saved their armies from the fate which befell those of Ludendorff in 1918."

According to M. Painlevé's testimony, Generals Foch and Pétain had decided, after a careful review of all the salient facts of the military position in the early summer of 1917, upon the following policy. I quote his words:—

"The million American soldiers promised us, guaranteed our definite superiority of effectives for 1st July, 1918.

Four great manufacturing programmes were to guarantee us for the same date a definite superiority in munitions:—

1. The output of fighting aeroplanes, followed by a programme for bombing aeroplanes, would make us masters of the air;
2. The output of heavy artillery, which would double our numbers of heavy guns;
3. An order for 2,500 small tanks (followed by a supplementary order for 500): it was the clear vision of Pétain which was responsible for ordering these in spite of the advice of many staff officers;
4. An enormous order for poison gas and smoke shells. The latter were to form a cloud in front of the tanks. As for the poison gas shells, the Germans had, at the Battle of Verdun, shown us the formidable and lasting effect of 'yperite' shells, which rendered the artillery preparations and counter-bombardments much more effective. . . .

These programmes were inspired by the painful lessons of 16th April; the necessity for the mastery of the air, for the means to destroy underground trenches and pill-boxes, for protection against machine-guns by tanks, for rapid preparations in case of surprise, etc. . . ."

This outline of what he calls the "long-dated" military policy was to be supplemented by an economic policy which would involve the

pooling of cereals amongst the Allies, the rationing of France in minerals and a "hermetical blockade" of the enemy. Attention was to be diverted to the enemy front in the Balkans as "an essential element of victory." General Pétain had in May suggested a combined offensive in Italy as an alternative to persisting with the Nivelles scheme. This idea was not pressed for reasons which I deal with later on. The Pétain-Foch policy was placed before the military mission of the Senate whose President was M. Clemenceau. After its examination had been concluded by that body, M. Clemenceau summed up the views of the Commission by saying: "Very well. We must hold on for a year. In a year there will be a million Americans in France and we can advance." Clemenceau was opposed throughout to the Flanders offensive. But he did not interfere, as our Generals were so intent on the enterprise. Thus the French dropped the policy of the great offensive and substituted the strategy of what Henry Wilson whimsically called "squatting and pulling faces at the Boche," until the Americans arrived.

A report prepared by Sir Henry Wilson, as liaison officer between French Headquarters and ours, was laid before the War Policy Committee by the C.I.G.S. Sir Henry Wilson admits in his diary that the Pétain and Foch plan had been imparted to him and also the Pétain and Foch view as to the projected offensive in Flanders. There is no reference to this important information in the report he prepared for the War Policy Committee after consultation with Sir Douglas Haig. According to Sir Henry Wilson's diary, General Foch was definitely opposed to the Haig strategy in Flanders. Brigadier-General Charteris, Haig's biographer, who was at the time the chief of Haig's Intelligence Staff, says that Pétain believed that all prospect of breaking through on the Western Front should be abandoned for the year and "that the British as well as the French Armies should confine their fighting to small operations with limited objectives."\* This information was withheld from the Cabinet.

All Charteris' extravagant reports as to German losses, German morale, broken German divisions, German shortage of ammunition, and generally, as to the gradual fading away of the German might, were passed on to the Cabinet, but we were never put in possession of this expression of Pétain's opinion. The fact that the French Commander gave his approval to the Flanders attack was communicated to the War Cabinet, but the essential fact, of which G.H.Q. were cognisant, that Pétain and Foch disapproved of that attack, was withheld.

Pétain had made it quite clear to Wilson as the liaison officer between British and French Headquarters that he disapproved of Haig's Flanders campaign. Here are extracts from Wilson's diary on this point: —

\* "Field-Marshal Earl Haig," by Brigadier-General Charteris, p. 269.



11th May: "Went to see Pétain. . . . He is opposed to Haig's plans of attack. . . . He is opposed to big attacks, and favours small fronts and great depths."

On 19th May, Pétain repeated to Wilson his objections to the Haig project:—

*"He told me that, in his opinion, Haig's attack towards Ostend was certain to fail, and that his effort to disengage Ostend and Zeebrugge was a hopeless one."*

Pétain promised Wilson to make his position and his plans absolutely clear to Haig when he met him. He seems to have redeemed this promise immediately and thereby caused great offence to the British Commander-in-Chief.

In spite of his conviction that the Flanders attack was a mistake, Pétain nevertheless, when Haig persisted in his scheme, gave both his approval and loyal support to the utmost which was compatible with his own duty to the shaken Army he was coaxing back to strength. He agreed to take over a small portion of the British line and to co-operate with two minor attacks at Verdun and Chemin des Dames, and ultimately he was able to give directions for a small French force under General Anthoine to co-operate with the British in Flanders itself. The Pétain limited offensives were highly successful. They took the Germans by surprise and achieved their objectives. They were not of the ruptural type. They were local in their character and were intended to be local in their results; the Germans assessed them at their true purpose and did not shift any great reserves to the attacked quarter for a counter-offensive. With these exceptions the fighting on the Western Front for the remainder of 1917 resolved itself into a desperate duel between the British and Germans, in which almost every effective German division on the Western Front was successfully engaged by the British. Nevertheless the German Front was never broken, and the British attack failed to achieve even its first objective line.

As to Foch, he was even more emphatic in his objection to the Flanders offensive. Writing in his diary on 17th May, Wilson says that "Foch was also anxious to know whether our Admiralty insisted upon Ostend and Zeebrugge being taken."

General Callwell, Sir Henry Wilson's biographer, commenting on this entry in Wilson's diary, says:—

"This was a point that Wilson appreciated, for he was beginning to doubt whether, in view of the likelihood that the Germans would bring strong forces across from the Eastern Front consequent on the rapid deterioration in Russian belligerent potentialities that was setting in, Haig's plan for recovering the Belgian littoral would prove feasible."

When Haig, in spite of the doubts expressed by French Generals as to the wisdom of his venture, insisted upon launching his great campaign, Foch, according to Wilson: —

*“wanted to know who it was who wanted Haig to go on ‘a duck’s march through the inundations to Ostend and Zeebrugge.’ He thinks the whole thing futile, fantastic and dangerous, and I confess I agree, and always have. . . . So Foch is entirely opposed to this enterprise, Jellicoe notwithstanding.”*

Early in June the British Army in France was given a practical lesson in the difficulty which Pétain would experience in affording them any effective aid in a great offensive policy. It had been agreed between the British and French Commanders that when Plumer was about to launch his attack on the Messines Ridge, the French should, in order to divert German attention and reserves, make an attack on some part of their front. This operation was to come off on 10th June. On 2nd June General Debeney had a conference with Sir Douglas Haig at which the latter was informed that the attack by the French must be cancelled because the morale of the troops was such that it could not be carried out.

Wilson, in the comment he makes on this cancellation, in his diary on 4th June, says: —

*“This endorses and underlines all that I have been saying for the last month or more, and I think, and hope, that it will finally dispose of Haig’s idea of taking Ostend and Zeebrugge.”\**

Why was it that things which Wilson, as liaison officer, had been saying for the last month or more to his military superiors, were never passed on to the Cabinet? And why was it that it was all omitted in a report, prepared by him after consultation with Haig, which aimed at inducing the Cabinet to accept a plan which Wilson thought, in agreement with Foch, was “futile, fantastic and dangerous?”

How the grave character of the mutinies in the French Army was deliberately minimised will be demonstrated by an extract from General Wilson’s report to us.

*“The condition of the Army is still good, wonderfully good considering all that it has gone through, but there are signs of unrest here and there which, though not yet serious, make me anxious for a long future. . . .”*

Nothing is said in the Wilson Report of the mutinies and seditious demonstrations. Were they not serious? We only heard from independent sources vague rumours of what had happened amongst the

\* “Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson,” by Major-General Sir C. E. Callwell, K.C.B., Vol. I, p. 359.

troops, and of Pétain's promise to the troops that there would be no more Champagne, Somme or Chemin des Dames offensives.

General Wilson further states in this Report that: —

“ The Committee have received information of a serious case of disaffection in one regiment of the French Army, though General Pétain is understood to be satisfied that he has the trouble in hand. The most disturbing symptom, however, of the weakening of the French Army is that General Pétain was reluctantly compelled to relinquish the offensive operation he agreed to undertake in concert with the British attack on the Messines Ridge. . . .”

These paragraphs would not give us any idea of the dimensions and character of the outbreaks, e.g., how the mutinies were spread over 16 Army Corps. Wilson does say that: —

“ nobody who knows the French Army of to-day—that is, the younger men in it, those who do the most of the fighting, will say it is as fine an instrument now as it was last autumn.”

He suggests, however, that the real weakness is not so much in the Army as behind the lines: —

“ The collapse of Russia has hit France very hard. For years and years before this war France built all her hopes on Russia, lent her vast sums of money to prepare herself for the War, and, therefore, the fall of Russia has come as a much greater shock to the French, than it has to us. . . .”

France is tired; the country is being governed by a set of men which does not contain, in my opinion, a single man of outstanding ability, of broad, far-seeing and statesmanlike views nor of personal character and prestige which might be claimed as a national asset.

The countrywomen of France—the real mainstay of the country—are tired. They dread more heavy losses, they are frightened of greater taxation, they can no longer work their little farms and their little businesses as they could during the first three years of the War, partly because they are tired and disheartened, and partly because labour gets less and less available, and money more and more scarce. . . .

In short, France is beginning to die away. I believe, if we and America know how to handle her, she will still go through the War to a victorious end, and in brighter times she will still be capable of feats of arms which at this moment are quite out of her power to achieve. Without being at all desperate the condition of France is serious, and she merits, and must receive, the utmost sympathy and the greatest possible assistance. . . .”\*

\* Report to C.I.G.S., dated 6th July, 1917.



Wilson used this information, not in order to impress upon the Committee the futility of the Flanders campaign without active French support, but in order to persuade them that it was necessary for us to win striking military successes in order to keep France in the War. But he never hints at the conclusion he had come to that these successes were not to be won in the direction or on the lines planned by Haig, and he carefully suppresses his information as to the conviction of the French military leaders that the Haig plan was doomed to fail. In fact, the document was clearly prepared in concert with the British Staff to influence the War Committee to go forward with the plan of G.H.Q. for a great campaign in the North without regard to the change in essential conditions. It was subtly contrived to tell us enough to justify a strong offensive by the British Army without revealing any of the facts that might lead us to turn down the Flanders scheme.

How came it that this eminent soldier, who was specially charged with the duty of acquiring all intelligence as to French movements, opinions and conditions which had a bearing on the conduct of the War by Britain, should have deemed it compatible with his highly responsible position to withhold from the Government, on the eve of an important decision by them, vital information that had actually been imparted to him as the liaison officer of the British Army? The story of the preparation of the memorandum which he submitted to the War Committee is told by his own biographer.

On his way to England Wilson was invited to stay at G.H.Q. at Blondécques, Haig's headquarters. Before he went there he "felt misgivings" and "was somewhat troubled as to the possible issue of the contest." Haig, however, seems to have soothed his anxious spirit. Wilson says:—

"He was most nice to me, begged me to do something with my 'great brains,' and said that there was always a bed and a welcome at his headquarters for me."

Wilson then hinted that he was on the look out for employment. Haig answered that:—

"He knew it well, that he trusted me absolutely, and that I had been invaluable to him and so on. So we parted."

This was from Haig who, as all knew, distrusted Wilson through and through.

Having by these means dispelled Wilson's doubts, Haig proceeded to explain to Wilson that the War Cabinet was opposed to the plans of G.H.Q. for the Flanders offensives, and he urged him to give these plans his support when he was called before the War Cabinet on arrival in London.

The biographer says that Wilson came back to England after the interview feeling that a special responsibility had been imposed upon him in connection with the contemplated offensive on a great scale to be undertaken by the British Expeditionary Forces. The memorandum he wrote for the Cabinet as the result of this wangling visit to G.H.Q. shows that he discharged that responsibility by toning down some facts and entirely suppressing others which starkly revealed might have frightened the War Committee into vetoing an attack which he himself was convinced would fail.

Thus, although the French view was communicated to our military chiefs, it was not passed on to the Cabinet.

## CHAPTER LXIII (*continued*)

### THE CAMPAIGN OF THE MUD: PASSCHENDAELE

#### 3. DISCUSSIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT ON THE POLICY OF THE FLANDERS OFFENSIVE

IN May, Sir Douglas Haig undertook a limited offensive with a view to capturing the Messines Ridge. That he called the First Phase in his campaign. The greater operation was only intended to take place "several weeks later and would not be carried out unless the situation were sufficiently favourable for it when the time came."

The Messines attack was left to General Plumer. He prepared the plan with his usual care, thoroughness and caution. The idea, as I have already mentioned, was originally his. The whole ground had been thoroughly observed, surveyed and registered under the direction of General Harington, one of the outstanding Staff Officers of the War. It is not too much to say that had he been at G.H.Q., Passchendaele would never have become one of the blackest horrors of history. One special feature of the Messines attack was the elaborate undermining of the German advanced positions. For months companies of men had been burrowing under the German advanced positions. Nothing was left to chance. Plumer believed not only in the possibility of making an effective attack on the Messines Ridge, but in the advantage which would be gained by the garrison of the Ypres salient through securing possession of the high ground on the right from which the German artillery poured their deadly missiles on our trenches and communications, every part of which was under their observation. But Plumer wished to treat it as an isolated operation and not as part of a general offensive in Flanders. To this last he was opposed, although the War Committee were not informed of his doubts. For reasons which the event revealed he did not believe in the feasibility of an attack on a great scale in that area and at that time. Although later on he carried out the particular operation that was entrusted to him in the attack on the Passchendaele-Staden Ridge with skill and success, he was never convinced of the wisdom of this particular campaign. In fact, the more he saw of the ground, the more rooted became his aversion to the whole plan. When I met him in Paris in November, on his way to take command of the British Army in Italy, he told me that



he was delighted to get away from that "terrible mud." He put the Messines attack in a totally different category. The position was one which had an important tactical value for the British Army in that area. It was a life-saving operation, for the Ypres salient was a death-trap. Moreover, the Ridge could be captured entirely in the course of a single attack, and the success could be rendered very much less costly because the element of surprise would be introduced through the springing of the mines under the German trenches.

The Messines attack was a clean victory, in the sense that it was a victory without any qualification or reserve. The objectives—the real objectives—were attained up to the last entrenched ruin and concrete machine-gun emplacement. The casualties were comparatively light. The operation was conducted with great dexterity and precision, and much credit is due to General Plumer and his Staff for the way the attack was planned and carried out.

Soon after the Messines victory, the Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of the Staff for the first time placed the whole of their plans for an extended offensive before the War Cabinet. A Committee of the Cabinet had been appointed on 8th June, 1917, to consider War Policy on all fronts—sea and land. It consisted of Lord Curzon, Lord Milner and General Smuts, with myself as Prime Minister in the Chair. Up to that date the Flanders project had never been submitted to the examination of the Government by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff or the Commander-in-Chief. It was understood that G.H.Q. had such a project in contemplation, but, to use the Commander-in-Chief's words, it would not be undertaken "unless the situation was sufficiently favourable for it when the time came."

On 19th June, a meeting of the Committee was held to discuss the matter. Sir Douglas Haig was brought over to explain his plans. Sir William Robertson also attended as the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

It is recorded that the Committee examined a raised map which Sir Douglas Haig had brought with him, and the Field-Marshal explained his plans in full detail.

I take the outline of his plans from a document prepared by him and sent to all his Army Commanders. In order to enable the reader to follow the various stages of the contemplated offensive, I have attached a map based on Sir Douglas Haig's orders. This is the projected campaign as sketched out by Headquarters:—

"1. The general situation at present is favourable to the attainment of considerable results in the offensive operations we are about to undertake.

Russia has resumed active operations apparently with excellent results and on a considerable scale. The effect on the Russian

Original British Front Line, July 1917 . . . . .

First Objective, Passchendaele-Staden Ridge . . . . .

Second Objective, Roulers-Thourout-Couckelaire-Ostend 1-1-1-1-1-1-1

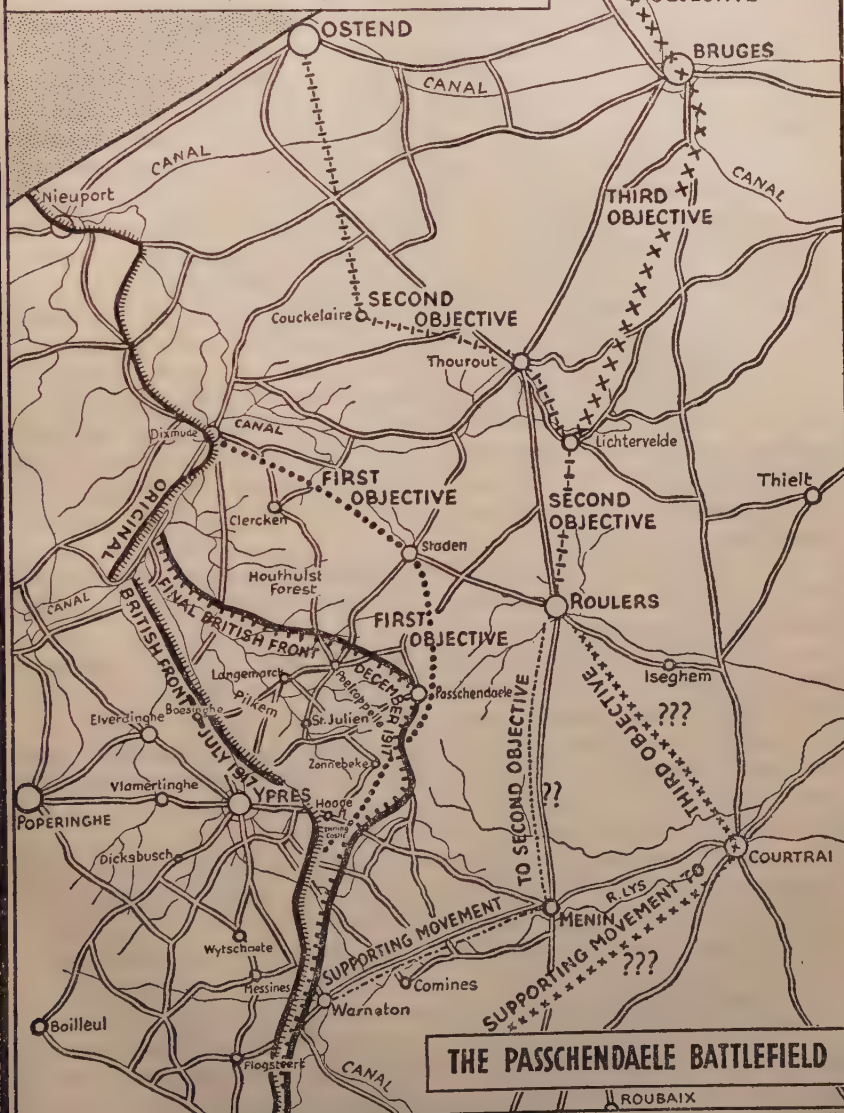
Third Objective, Bruges . . . . .

Suggested supporting movements of 2nd. Army

To Second Objective . . . . .

To Third Objective . . . . .

Limit of actual advance, December, 1917. . . . .



# THE PASSCHENDAELE BATTLEFIELD

people of the successes gained is reported to be such as may lead to the development and maintenance of still greater efforts.

Before this Russian attack the endurance of the Central Powers and their allies was based on three main factors: hope that Russia would make peace, or at least remain inactive; confidence in the power of the German Armies to hold their 'impregnable' positions; and belief in England being starved into submission by the submarine campaign before the Armies of the United States could take the field in strength.

We know that German faith in the submarine campaign must soon be abandoned entirely. Confidence in the invincibility of the German Armies had already been so severely shaken that it cannot survive many fresh defeats. And hope of Russian inaction has now been dispelled.

Coming at a moment when the heavy attacks the enemy has been making on the French Front have failed to achieve success, and when he is looking forward with grave anxiety to a resumption of the British offensive and to the possibility of renewed attacks by our French and Italian Allies, this sudden resumption of a dangerous offensive on the Eastern Front is a very heavy blow to him.

We were justified in hoping for success with the possibility of great results from our next offensive before we had this convincing evidence of Russia's intention and ability to fulfil her whole duty to her allies. We are still more justified in this hope now, and our plans must be laid to exploit to the full the possibilities of the situation.

With this object the following instructions are issued in confirmation and amplification of those already given to Army Commanders:—

2. The Fifth Army assisted on its right by the Second Army and co-operating on its left with the French and Belgians, is *first to secure the PASSCHENDAELE-STADEN Ridge*.\*

*To drive the enemy off that Ridge from STIRLING CASTLE in the south to DIXMUDE\** in the north is likely to entail very hard fighting lasting perhaps for weeks; but as a result of this we may hope that our subsequent progress will be more rapid.

3. Subject to modifications necessitated by development in the situation, *the next effort* of the Fifth Army, with the French and the Belgians—*after gaining the Ridge mentioned above*—will be directed north-eastwards to gain *the line (approximately) THOUROUT-COUCKELAERE*.

4. *Simultaneously* with this advance to the THOUROUT-COUCKELAERE line the Fourth Army, acting in combination with naval forces, will attack the enemy about NIEUPORT and on the coast to the east of there.

\* Please follow the names on attached map.



5. The Fourth Army and the forces attacking the line THOUROUT-*COUCKELAERE* will *afterwards* operate to join hands on the general line THOUROUT-OSTEND and to push on towards BRUGES.

6. Operations eastward, and towards LICHTERVELDE, from the PASSCHENDAELE-STADEN Ridge will be required to cover the right flank of the advance on THOUROUT; and *possession of the high ground between THOUROUT and ROULERS* will be of importance subsequently to cover the flank of the advance on BRUGES.

7. *In the operations subsequent to the capture of the PASSCHENDAELE-STADEN Ridge opportunities for the employment of cavalry in masses are likely to offer.*

8. The Second Army will cover and co-operate with the right flank of the Fifth Army as already ordered and will be prepared to take over gradually the defence of the main Ridge from the Fifth Army, possibly as far as PASSCHENDAELE or even to a further point.

The Commander of the Second Army will also be prepared with plans to develop an advance towards the line WARNETON-MENIN, or to push forward on the right of the Fifth Army to the line COURTRAI-ROULERS (throwing out a flank guard along the line of the LYS), if circumstances should render such movements desirable as the situation develops.

9. *As far as can be foreseen at present the main operations after the capture of the STIRLING CASTLE-PASSCHENDAELE-DIXMUDE Ridge, will be those directed towards OSTEND and BRUGES.*

In these circumstances our resources, to the utmost possible limit, will be concentrated on these operations; and, provided the degree of success gained is sufficient to justify it, we must be prepared to reduce the garrison of the remainder of our line to mere outposts with a few centrally-placed reserves.

The Commanders of the Armies south of the river LYS will accordingly be prepared with plans to release as large forces as possible to ensure the success of the main operations. Those plans should be so designed as to admit of the gradual withdrawal of forces to the north as the situation develops.

Meanwhile as much activity as possible will continue to be displayed along our defensive front, in order to wear down and deceive the enemy, this preventing any transfer of his forces from that front.

10. The above outline of possibilities is issued to enable Army Commanders to foresee and prepare for what may be required of them. The progress of events may demand modifications or alterations of plan from time to time and—especially in view of the comparatively short period of fine weather which we can count on—our progress before winter sets in may fall short of what would otherwise have been within our power this year.

*The general situation is such, however, that the degree of success gained and the results of it may exceed general expectations, and we must be prepared for the possibility of great developments and ready to take full advantage of them.*

11. *The extent of the success gained will depend much on the concentration and continuity of effort at the right time and place, and the necessary concentration must be attained by a bold reduction of force at other points, and by ensuring that to the utmost extent possible every fit man takes his place in the ranks. Army Commanders will satisfy themselves that, during the coming offensive, no man fit to be in the ranks is employed elsewhere without most urgent and necessary reason.*

12. *The drafts available to replace casualties are limited in number and in the great struggle before us it is essential that, without in the least degree relaxing the strength and continuity of our efforts, we shall conserve the energy of our officers and men so that we may outstay the enemy. For this the utmost use must be made of all means of offence and defence at our disposal. All ground gained must be held, by rifle and bayonet alone if no assistance is obtainable from other arms. In the attack, more especially in the earlier attacks, each step must be thoroughly prepared and organised. Every advance must be carried out steadily—but none the less vigorously—with thorough combination and mutual support between the troops employed. The tendency of isolated bodies of troops to dash forward beyond the reach of support must be held in check. This tendency, springing from the finest motives, is of the greatest value if controlled and used for adequate objects, whereas if uncontrolled and misapplied it leads to the loss of many of the most gallant officers and men without the gain of compensating advantages.*

*Conducting our operations on these principles, as has been done with such success on so many previous occasions during the past twelve months, we may look forward with confidence to still greater successes in the near future."*

It will be seen that it was not a campaign for the capture of the village of Passchendaele. That in itself would only have added to the difficulties of the British Army by substituting a new and narrower salient than that which had cost us so dearly at Ypres. It was not a scheme even for capturing the whole of the Passchendaele Ridge, from Messines to Dixmude. That was only the "first objective." After that there would be opportunities for the employment of "cavalry in masses." We should then swoop onward to the capture of Roulers and Thourout and the ridge or ridges between them, which would have brought the British Army within sight of the North Sea. On the right we were to push onward as far as

Courtrai. Then there was to be a converging movement from Thourout and Nieuport, right along the coast for the capture of Ostend. But this was not the final objective, for when Ostend was captured our victorious armies were to take Bruges on their way to even greater things. There is more than a hint that the success gained might exceed general expectations, and that we must be prepared for the possibility of even greater developments.

The reference to "masses of cavalry" contemplated a beaten foe in full and disordered retreat. Where would that retreat end?

When Sir Douglas Haig explained his projects to the civilians, he spread on a table or desk a large map and made a dramatic use of both his hands to demonstrate how he proposed to sweep up the enemy—first the right hand brushing along the surface irresistibly, and then came the left, his outer finger ultimately touching the German frontier with the nail across. He must have been in this mood when he indited this tremendous order of battle to Generals who between them commanded a million and a half of troops, the flower of the Empire's youth.

The War Policy Committee were then taken up into the aerial tower built during the past six months or more by the industry and imagination of G.H.Q. to view this thrilling prospect. It is not surprising that some of our number were so captivated by the splendour of the landscape opened out to our vision that their critical faculties were overwhelmed. Mr. Bonar Law, Lord Milner and I still remained sceptical.

It must not be forgotten, in judging the perpetrators of this ambitious but ill-advised venture, that all the facts that mattered were in the possession of G.H.Q. before they ever completed their scheme. Now we realise what a foolhardy project it was, when all the known facts are taken into account—that is, known at the time to G.H.Q. But the most vital were withheld from the War Cabinet.

I have in my possession notes taken of the discussions which ensued, and a full Minute of the statement which I made at the end of our consultations.\* I have also a copy of a written memorandum which I submitted in the course of the discussion to Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig for their consideration, and copies of their replies. The Commander-in-Chief based his argument in favour of the enterprise on the following considerations:—

He led us to believe that it was not an isolated operation where the whole brunt of the attack on the German lines in the West would be left to the British Army. He opened the proceedings by stating that both the French and the Belgians were in agreement with the project and promised effective co-operation. When it was urged that the condition of the French Army would make it improbable that they would undertake an offensive on such a scale as

\* I hope the verbatim Minute of the discussion will one day be published.



would prevent the Germans from taking fresh divisions from the French Front to ours, he replied that Pétain had assured him that his offensive would be of a character to avoid that possibility. As to Pétain's "agreement" with the plan, he never informed the Committee that both Pétain and Foch were opposed to the idea and that they would have preferred that Haig should take over part of the French line and keep the Germans busy by attacks here and there on a limited front.

He laid great stress on the "exhaustion" of the German Army and its loss of morale.

He reviewed the German position in detail. He said that they had only 13 "fresh" and 35 "used" divisions in reserve. Their communications were inferior to ours. Their morale had greatly deteriorated. In confirmation of this he read the following extract from a report:—

"Morale: The following are the impressions of a member of the American Relief Committee, who left Belgium at the beginning of May:—

'The morale of the German troops is bad; they realise that they are beaten, but live in the hopes that something will turn up to save them from disaster.

There has lately been noticeable deterioration in the uniform and equipment of the German troops; the latter no longer present a smart appearance.

The rations of the troops not in the fighting line have been much reduced, and there are many complaints.

Rolling stock is much worn out.

The morale of the civilian population in Belgium is excellent.'

In further confirmation of his estimate as to the poverty of the German morale, Haig stated that at Messines the Germans had known we were about to attack, and had made every preparation for defence, but were completely defeated.

When it was pointed out to him that on the whole Western Front the Germans had according to War Office information a superiority in artillery, especially in the heavier calibres, which were the most important factors in such a struggle, Sir Douglas Haig alleged that the Germans were now short of ammunition, and that their guns were very inaccurate. Sir William Robertson came to his support by stating that he thought the estimates of the Intelligence Department of the War Office as to the German artillery were exaggerated. When the War Committee expressed apprehension as to the probability of so great an operation causing heavy casualties, which

wing to the difficulties we were experiencing with man-power would be difficult to replace, the Commander-in-Chief thought there was no ground for our fears. He called attention to the slowness of the losses we had sustained in capturing Messines and the Vimy Ridge, and how in the latter case we had penetrated far into the German line in the course of a single day with comparatively small losses. In that attack, one division, according to him, had pierced the German Front to a depth of five miles. If this attack were equally successful, that would enable us to reach a portion of the Passchendaele Ridge which constituted the first offensive in the course of a single day without any serious casualties.

As to man-power, the supplies of ammunition and guns, Sir William Robertson anticipated no difficulty. As for men, he hoped to have 150,000 to send out, with which to supply the 20,000 or 30,000 wanted to complete the establishment of the Army in France, and *replace the casualties suffered in the attack*. He would also send out the 67th Division. He considered the position to be sufficiently favourable to justify undertaking the operations in the manner proposed by the Commander-in-Chief.

As to the results he expected from this venture, the Commander-in-Chief made it quite clear to the Committee that he anticipated not merely that he would capture the Passchendaele Ridge, but that the operation would result in our securing the Flemish Coast.

Admiral Jellicoe was called in to bear his testimony to the grave need of achieving this aim before the winter, and he stated categorically that unless that were done, the position would become impossible, and that unless we cleared the Germans out of Zeebrugge this year, we could not go on with the War next year through lack of shipping. This startling and reckless declaration I challenged indignantly, but the First Sea Lord adhered to it.

I concluded our discussion at this meeting of the Committee by appealing to General Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig to realise our difficulties in regard to man-power.

“We were now reduced to scraping men up from munition works, mines, and agriculture, and from among those formerly rejected on medical grounds. Popular agitation was growing stronger against those measures. We were most anxious to support Sir Douglas, particularly in view of his brilliant successes at Vimy and Messines, but I did not want our army to be drawn into a military enterprise before it was ready for it, for it would involve serious trouble at home in regard to men, which would not be worth while on behalf of a failure. At the moment we were bearing the whole burden of the War, for America was not yet able to play its part, and I would prefer to reserve our strength until next year. While I quite understood Sir Douglas Haig's point of

view, the Committee must consider whether it would not be better to hold our hand until the French Army had been resuscitated by the intervention of America."

After the first day's discussion, I thought it desirable to set down in writing my objections to the operation, so as to afford Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig an opportunity for considering them carefully before we resumed our talk. The first part of my statement was an endeavour to summarise some of the arguments which had been advanced in support of the proposed offensive and which I have already stated. I then gave my arguments against the plan:—

#### " ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE PLAN

1. A great attack which fails in its objective whilst entailing heavy casualties must necessarily discourage the British Army and thus lower the splendid morale which it now exhibits, and might very well have disastrous effects upon public opinion in Britain and France.

2. The Cabinet must regard themselves as trustees for the fine fellows who constitute our army. They are willing to face any dangers, and they do so without complaint, but they trust to the leaders of the nation to see that their lives are not needlessly thrown away, and that they are not sacrificed on mere gambles which are resorted to merely because those who are directing the War can think of nothing better to do with the men under their command.

3. It is therefore imperative that before we embark upon a gigantic attack which must necessarily entail the loss of scores of thousands of valuable lives, and produce that sense of discouragement which might very well rush nations into premature peace, that we should feel a fair confidence that such an attack has a reasonable chance of succeeding. A mere gamble would be both a folly and a crime.

4. *What are the chances of success?* Our superiority on the Western Front, even assuming the French put in the whole of their strength, amounts to 15 per cent. in men. In guns there is an equality. In ammunition each army has an adequate supply for the purposes for which it needs ammunition. We have a sufficiency of ammunition for offensive purposes. There is every reason to believe that the Germans have an adequate supply for defensive purposes. In leadership, in discipline, in quality of troops, taking the armies through and through from Nieupoort to Mulhausen, there is something like equality. But in reserves—and this is vital—the Germans are this year superior to the Allies. The Russian Front is not likely to absorb any of their reserves, so



that practically the whole of these are available for the West. The French have practically no reserves: their reserves are not adequate even to supply the wastage on a non-fighting basis. The A.G.'s paper reveals only too clearly what our position is in respect of reserves. The C.I.G.S. in a speech the other day said the nation was prepared to do anything as long as it was clearly told what was expected of it. Unfortunately that is only partially true. The nation was told that we wanted the young men out of the munition yards. Our efforts provoked a strike which lost us hundreds of guns and aeroplanes and did not in the end give us the men. Supposing we make a similar attempt to get men out of the mines, who is prepared to guarantee that there will be no strike amongst the miners? No one in his senses would suggest we should take any more able-bodied men from agriculture and the shipbuilding yards until the submarine menace has been completely overcome. Of that there is no immediate prospect. The re-examination of the medical rejects has provoked a violent campaign throughout the land, which has materially assisted the pacifist propaganda. That the A.G. admits. Can anyone point to any reservoir of men available for army recruiting, the enforced enlistment of whom would not excite the same unrest, disaffection and labour troubles which have baffled all our other efforts to raise men for the British Army?

5. Even our superiority of 15 per cent. is based on the assumption that the French will count as much in this attack man for man as either the Germans or ourselves. In the face of repeated warnings which we have received from well-informed and competent observers, it would be madness on our part to proceed on such an assumption. Our two military representatives with the French Army have deemed it to be their painful duty to intimate in the most explicit terms that we cannot this year rely upon the French Army to take its full part in such an enterprise as we contemplate. For the moment, its fighting spirit is impaired—it is full of distrust, suspicion and discouragement. I fear we do not always sufficiently appreciate the terrible character of the sacrifices already made by the French nation. Two millions of their young men have already been put out of action either through death, disease, mutilation or internment.\* No country in this War has sustained anything like the losses which have been borne so heroically by the French people. They were looking forward to this year as the year of their liberation; they had been told that the Russians had been re-equipped, that the British Army had enormously increased its strength in men, guns and ammunition,

\* This is the figure arrived at after deducting out of the total casualties the wounded who have returned to the ranks.

The Naval Attaché confirms these reports in an alarming letter to the First Lord.

that the Italians had also improved their army; and they were anticipating a great converging movement which would overwhelm the resistance of the Central Powers and bring the War to a victorious issue. The collapse of Russia has been to them a bitter disappointment. The failure of their offensive has intensified this disappointment, and for the moment the French Army and nation are suffering from a natural wave of dejection. The marvel is that under such repeated discouragements as have attended their efforts during the last three years, this depression has been so long deferred. Even the bravest waver under these conditions. It has been clear for some time that their leaders are rootedly opposed to undertaking operations on a great scale this year. Even if we persuade them at a conference, the instinct of the French Army will re-assert itself, and the further we go from the Conference, the less will be the disposition to carry out its resolution. That is exactly what happened after the last Paris Conference. The agreement was as satisfactory as any arrived at at any conference during the War. The execution completely failed. We cannot drag an unwilling army with doubting leaders and a disheartened nation into the most gigantic battle ever waged.

It is therefore proposed that we should rush into the greatest battle of the War, against an enemy almost equal in number, quite equal in equipment, still the greatest army in Europe in everything that constitutes an efficient fighting force, with larger reserves than our own, to make up the deficiency during this year, holding formidable defensive positions which he has taken three years to strengthen and to perfect; and we are to launch this attack with doubtful support from our most powerful and important ally—a support so hesitating that the Germans might be able to afford practically to deal with it without concentrating behind the attacked front any great masses of men and guns. They could then afford to convert their present slight inferiority of men and guns opposite the British Army into an actual superiority.

I know too well that those who are anxious to plunge into this fight might persuade themselves that the promises of the French sufficiently meet the exigencies of the case. In their hearts they must know that this cannot be so. Even if the French Army pulls its full weight, the Allies can only command a bare superiority on the Western Front. If it pulls less than its full weight we shall be attacking the strongest army in the world, entrenched in the most formidable positions with an actual inferiority of numbers. *I do not pretend to know anything about the rules of strategy, but curious indeed must be the military conscience which could justify an attack under such conditions.*

6. Although a great success might cheer up the French people

and inspire them to greater deeds, a failure might very well be disastrous in its effect on French opinion. We have been warned by General Wilson that even a repetition of the Messines Ridge will not be regarded in France as a substantial success, and that it will produce no beneficent effect on the French mind. I ask whether the C.I.G.S. anticipates that anything better than Vimy and Messines can ensue as the result of this attack. *Brilliant preliminary successes followed by weeks of desperate and sanguinary struggles, leading to nothing except perhaps the driving of the enemy back a few barren miles—beyond that nothing to show except a ghastly casualty list.* I earnestly entreat our military advisers as well as the Cabinet to think again before they finally commit the British Army to an attack, the failure of which may very well weary the Allied nations into accepting any plausible peace that might be offered them by an equally weary foe.

Since our last review of the situation, when the Commander-in-Chief was present, we have had a good deal of authoritative fresh evidence as to the condition of the French Army. We should be guilty of a serious dereliction of duty if we did not give due weight to the very grave reports presented by General Wilson, Colonel Spears and the Naval Attaché and *to the important information we have received as to the report made to the French Ambassador by M. Abel Ferry.* Their reports have more than confirmed the apprehensions we had formed and we should not be justified in risking scores of thousands of British lives on the assumption that we could disregard the solemn admonitions involved in these documents.

### ALTERNATIVES

The fundamental error of the Allied strategy up to the present has been the refusal of their war direction to recognise the fact that the European battlefield is one and indivisible. A corollary to this error has been the concentration of the strongest armies on the attacking of the strongest fronts, whilst the weakest fronts have been left to the less well-equipped armies. We have thus allowed the Balkans to be captured by the Central Powers, who had at any rate the intelligence to realise the strategic importance of that area. Austria and Turkey, which might by well-directed blows have been overthrown in 1915 or 1916, have been regarded by France and England as mere "side-shows" having no bearing upon the general result of the campaign. This narrow and unimaginative conception of our military strategy will, I predict, always be pointed to as the reason why the Allies in spite of their overwhelming preponderance, have been so successfully held at bay by an enemy considerably inferior in numbers. The question is whether it is too late even now to retrieve the consequence of this



mistake. I believe another opportunity is presenting itself to the Allies, and the same prejudices and narrowness of outlook are conspiring to repeat our blunders. Austria and Turkey are still the weakest fronts, but we still insist on ignoring that fact, and wasting our strength on endeavouring to break through the strongest and best-fortified, the most skilfully and powerfully held front in the whole battlefield. If either Turkey or Austria were overthrown it would be the beginning of the disintegration and consequent destruction of the Central Powers. If Austria were defeated it would lead to a separate peace with that Empire. Turkey and Bulgaria would be isolated, and being left without supplies or support from the Central Powers could much more easily be overthrown. The Russian Army could then concentrate against Germany alone; a million men would be withdrawn from the Austrian frontier and thrown on to the German Front. The French, the Russians, and ourselves could by next year spare nearly a million men from the attack on Turkey and the Balkans, and the Italians could in the first instance spare men for an attack on Turkey, where they have great hopes, and afterwards to assist their Allies in France.

A separate peace with Austria would have this additional advantage which is not altogether to be despised. The feeling between Austria and Germany which has long ago ceased to be cordial, would be so aggravated that Germany would not dare to leave her Austrian frontier entirely unprotected. Thus with an additional million Russians thrown on to her Eastern frontier, and an additional million French, British and Italians, with perhaps half a million Americans on her Western frontier, a portion of her troops detached to watch her Southern frontier, the breaking-up of the German power would only be a matter of a few months at the outside. We could thus achieve the only peace which is ever likely to be a permanent one in Europe by the imposition upon Germany of terms which would completely cripple her offensive power.

But two questions must first of all be answered. Is it feasible by any military plan to bring about the defeat of Austria during the coming autumn? And in the second place, if Austria were defeated, would she then make a separate peace with the Allies?

I firmly believe that it is within the compass of the Allied resources, if properly directed, to inflict a heavy blow and possibly even a decisive defeat upon Austria this year. What is the Austrian position? It is from the military point of view an exceptionally weak one. Out of her population of 50,000,000 nearly 30,000,000 are racially and politically antagonistic to the war aims of the Empire. Three-fifths of the population belong to races the majority of whom are in alliance with us—Slavs, Roumanians, Poles,

Italians. A case which would have been analogous to that of the Austrian Empire would have been that of this country if we were at war with the United States of America, with three-fifths of our population Irish, the United States placing in the forefront of its war objectives the emancipation of the Irish race from English control. From a military point of view the Austrian plight is a singularly perilous one. How dangerous it is may very well be inferred from the ease with which whole Austrian battalions on the Eastern Front have surrendered. There is the case the other day of the Austrian regiment that marched into the Russian lines with its bands playing and its banner flying. It is clear that the Austrian troops are not putting up a serious resistance against the Russian advance. Economically the food position is grave. The Hungarian harvest this year is but 40 per cent. of the normal. In finance the situation is so serious that the actual figures of the Austrian budget were withheld from Parliament. As to manpower the reports indicate that there are no reserves behind the lines. No wonder that the information received from Spain which on Austrian matters is first hand, indicates a pleased surprise on the part of the Austrian military authorities that the Allies have not yet taken advantage of these circumstances to press a vigorous offensive against the Austrians. The famous Erzberger Speech in the Reichstag is believed to have had reference to the grave condition of Austria, and the suppression of all Austrian news in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* is also attributed to the same cause. The repeated and urgent peace advances made by Austria during the present year, many of them emanating directly from authoritative quarters, prove that those who have the direction of affairs in Austria are nervous and alarmed as to the prospect. All the information received points in one direction—that Austria is on the point of a collapse, and that it needs but powerful and vigorous pressure to precipitate her downfall.

As to whether Austria would in the event of a great military defeat make a separate peace with the Allies, all the indications point in the direction; in fact, as I have already stated, actual overtures in that direction have already been made. No peace could be possible without satisfying the legitimate claims of Italy and no Italian statesman would be allowed to make peace without securing both the Trentino and Trieste. The Trentino, Austria would, I understand, be prepared even now to surrender. Trieste she cannot give up unless the Italians actually conquer it. But if Trieste were captured then it would be easier for Austria to concede it.

Can Trieste be captured? The Italian lines are now eight miles away from that city. We are promised that by a vigorous offensive we can drive the German Army with its well-equipped, well-led

and homogeneous force, a distance of between 20 and 30 miles and capture Zeebrugge and Ostend. Surely then, there ought to be a chance of driving the more demoralised, more heterogeneous, less well-supported Austrian Army a distance of eight miles? In the north we have practically no superiority of men in attacking the Germans. The Italians have a superiority of between 50 and 100 per cent. over the Austrians. What they lack is guns and ammunition; these we can supply. It may be said that if the Austrian position is in peril, the Germans will realise just as certainly as we do the disastrous consequences which might ensue to the Alliance, and would therefore throw in masses of men and guns to support the Austrians. My answer to that is threefold:—

1. By skilful measures of concealment we could bring our additional guns up to the Italian Front without the knowledge of the Austrians. There are 40 of our howitzers already in position. It is proposed, I understand, to double the number. Ammunition could be piled up behind these in quantities adequate to the supply of 300 howitzers. The Austrians ought not to discover the arrival there of the additional howitzers until the bombardment begins, and it would take even Germans a few weeks to bring up fresh divisions to the Isonzo. Meanwhile the Hermada ought to be captured, and that would place Trieste at the mercy of the Italians.

2. If the Germans move troops from the Western Front or the Eastern Front to the Isonzo, that would be the time to attack their lines in France, and even if we sent another 300 guns to the Italian Front we should still have twice as many heavy guns left and at least three times as much ammunition as we had at the commencement of the Somme offensive.

3. What does it matter whether we fight Germans in the north of France or in Italy. The only difference would be that if we fought them in France we should be doing it at the expense of our own troops, whereas in Italy we can use the enormous reserves of the Italians. And this leads me to the next point.

4. France has no reserves. I have already pointed out what the A.G. says about the unsatisfactory condition of our recruiting. But Italy has masses of well-trained men behind the lines. The Italian casualties have been comparatively slight, and the Allies have not up to the present used Italian man-power to the best advantage. Is it not now the turn of the Italians to take their share of heavy fighting? If the Germans really divert their troops to Italy—and that is the assumption of those who oppose this Italian project—then the French Army will get the rest it stands sadly in need of, and our Army, instead of exhausting its limited reserves, will have time to accumulate.



This Italian scheme has the additional advantage that it requires no ships. The moral impression throughout Italy would be incalculable. The enthusiasm with which our small contingent of heavy guns was received is the best possible proof of that. They have already increased enormously Britain's hold on the Italian mind, and if we sent a few hundred guns with large stores of ammunition, and these enabled the Italian Army to cleave a way through to Trieste, Britain would win a place in the heart of Italy from which she could never be driven. The Italians are eager to carry out this plan; they are willing to risk their men, and the plan proposed by General Cadorna has had the full support of General Foch, probably the ablest strategist in the French Army. If the plan failed in achieving its full object, what is the worst that can happen? That the Italian Army after making an advance of a few miles would be brought to a standstill. It would have sustained heavy casualties. But even then it would have weakened the Austrian Army; it would have occupied large forces of Austrians and Germans, and to that extent it would have helped the Russians with the further offensive which they propose making in September."

When we met at noon of the following day to resume our discussion, both Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig read out statements which they had prepared in reply to mine. According to their statement, before the Somme offensive the Germans had had a superiority of nearly 600 guns of 5.9-inch calibre and above, whereas at the present time the Allies had a superiority of seven. On the other hand, the strength of the German Army had increased by nearly 160,000 men since that battle.

Sir William Robertson said that, personally, he was sceptical of Austria making a separate peace, as her whole future depended upon her relations with Germany, to whose wheels she was tied in a variety of ways, economic, industrial, political, etc. Assuming, however, that she would make a separate peace if fairly heavily punished, he was doubtful whether she could be so punished. *The artillery could not be got there and got ready for battle in less than six weeks.* The passage of this number of guns through Italy *could not be concealed* and the enemy might be expected to have the best part of a month for counter-preparations.\* And the Germans, as soon as they discovered what we were up to, would be there before us, as they enjoyed the advantage of an interior position, which enabled them to move their troops more quickly than we could move ours.†

\* Our military representative at the Italian Front, General Delmé-Radcliffe, was of opinion that guns and ammunition could be transferred to the Italian Front without attracting the attention of the enemy.

† The Germans repeatedly moved troops from front to front without our discovering it.

*The Allied offensive on the Western Front had prevented the Germans from undertaking any offensive operations in Italy. If Germany were relieved from serious pressure on the Western Front, she would be in much the same position for attacking Italy as she was last March, but plus the advantage she might get from the weakening of the Russians, and therefore if she decided to reinforce the Italian Front to the extent regarded as possible by Cadorna, not only could he not defeat Austria but he himself would need support.*

So much for the prospect of Austria being defeated. As regards our position, if the 75 batteries were sent *we must necessarily pass to the defensive for all practical purposes*, and be prepared to suffer losses similar to those suffered by the Germans while on the defensive this summer.\* *Also we must abandon all hope of making either our air or sea situation more secure* so far as the Belgian coast was concerned, *and, in fact, the Germans might conquer us by an attempt to take Dunkirk*, and if they succeeded the situation would become even worse than it was now. He "did not say that they would succeed, as this would depend to some extent upon the reinforcements that Germany might be able to bring over from the Russian Front and upon the power of her artillery. *This power has not been great recently*, and as the number of heavy guns she has on the Western Front are approximately equal to the Allies, her failure must be due to other reasons—for instance, the declining morale, inferiority in the air, inefficient employment of the guns, or want of ammunition. He did not pretend to say which; it might be a combination of all." In a striking but sinister sentence he said that:—

*"We should follow the principle of the gambler who has the heaviest purse and force our adversary's hand and make him go on spending until he is a pauper."*

Germany would bring over heavy reinforcements if Russia continued to do nothing or if she dropped out of the War altogether. The best chance we had of keeping her in the field was to continue our activity, for if we stopped being aggressive she might think that we admitted our failures. Further, the Russians were themselves supposed to be preparing for an offensive early next month, and had asked us to keep up our pressure.

The conclusion he had arrived at, taking the broadest possible view of the general situation, was that our chances of obtaining good results were certainly no greater in Italy than they were in the North, while the risks involved were much greater in the former place than in the latter. *He deprecated as strongly as anyone our incurring heavy casualties without a corresponding return*, BUT THE PLAN AS

\* This is on the assumption that Germans attack us on the Western Front, i.e., do not send any divisions to Italy.

OUTLINED BY THE FIELD-MARSHAL SHOULD SECURE US AGAINST THIS MISTAKE. *He had shown, and he understood the War Cabinet agreed, that we must continue to be aggressive somewhere on our front, and we ought, of course, to do this in the most promising direction. The plan provided for this and would enable us to derive a real advantage till the enemy showed signs of weakening, while at the same time it permitted of our easing off if the situation so demands. Doubtful situations, such as the present one, had always arisen in war, and great mistakes had been made by endeavouring to find a fresh way round as soon as the strain began to be felt. We should be on our guard against this mistake.\**

He was therefore in favour of continuing our present plan on the chance of getting a success in the North, not only because of the military situation but also because of the necessity of trying to improve the air and sea situation, and he was consequently averse to diverting any of our resources to Italy. We should, however, do all we could to provide Italy with means for increasing her ammunition supply as she already had far more guns than she could keep employed, and in this connection he would remind the War Cabinet that there was no reason why Italy should remain inactive throughout the winter, as operations could continue on the Isonzo up to the end of January.

Asked whether, by the last paragraph, Sir William Robertson meant that we could, if we wished, help the Italians at some later date, he replied that we could consider it.

Sir Douglas Haig said that his views had been asked as to the expediency of delaying our main attack as planned by him until 1918, in order that the British Army might still be strong in that year. He himself knew the situation at the present moment, but could not forecast the future. *He considered the present moment favourable. He was fully in agreement with the Committee that we ought not to push attacks that had not a reasonable chance of success, but that we ought to proceed step by step. He himself had no intention of entering into a tremendous offensive involving heavy losses. His plan was aggressive without committing us too far.†*

Sir Douglas Haig then read his statement "on the strategical situation with special reference to the comparative advantages of an offensive in Northern Belgium as against an offensive from Italy against Austria."

I give the following extracts from the Memorandum.‡

\* What about the Peninsular War and the march through Georgia, one attacking Napoleon on a vulnerable flank, and the other turning the flank of the Confederacy in the American Civil War?

† This undertaking, coupled by a similiar promise already given by Sir William Robertson, had a considerable influence on the Committee.

‡ The full text of Sir William Robertson's and Sir Douglas Haig's Memoranda are given in Appendices I and II.



"The railway capacity of Northern Belgium is sufficient for the maintenance of some 40 German divisions north of the River Lys and possibly even more.

But given our present superiority in the air, we could almost certainly cause such serious interruptions and consequent disorganisation in the railway working (by bombing important junctions) as to upset all calculations.

In any case the limiting factor may be taken as the number of German divisions available rather than as a question of railway capacity.

On the 17th June, Germany had *156 divisions on the Western Front*. Of these, 25 were in the Army entrusted with the defence of Northern Belgium, leaving 131 for the defence of the remainder of the German line. . . .

Of the 131 divisions available for defence on the long front (roughly, 400 miles) from the Lys to Switzerland, only 43 were fresh. . . .

German divisions have a low establishment and no less than 17 Landwehr divisions of comparatively poor quality are included in the figures given.

One division in line to about two miles of front on which attack is expected is as much as we need expect to be employed against us; and, allowing for the flooded area, 14 or 15 divisions may be taken as the largest force that will be placed in line between the Lys and the sea. The reserves at first available behind that front are unlikely—for the reasons given above—to exceed ten divisions, and there may be two or three divisions in addition placed on the coast itself.

If fresh divisions can be brought from Russia we may confidently expect them to be centrally placed, at some distance back, until the situation is clear; or they may be used to relieve exhausted divisions at special points, the latter being drawn into central reserves.

At present Germany's reduction of her forces on the Russian front is practically limited to exchanging fresh troops there for tired ones from the West. *But the number of her good divisions in the East is limited and, moreover, it is estimated that her transport facilities will only suffice to move ten divisions a month from the East.*

*For all these reasons we are justified in calculating that the Allies will have a considerable superiority in infantry on the front of attack—probably not less than two to one. And our capacity for exchanging tired divisions for fresh ones along our defensive line will not be less than that of the Germans.*

In guns and ammunition, judging by experience and information from captured orders, etc., our superiority will be even greater; while, in the air we may regard our superiority as still

more assured. The last mentioned factor is of immense importance from the points of view of artillery efficiency, information, damage behind the enemy's lines, and general morale.

As regards the alternative to an attack in Belgium, namely, attacking Austria from Italy, the arguments against this are overwhelmingly stronger than those in favour of it."

Then comes a paragraph which is a most compendious exposition of the policy I had been pressing upon the Allies ever since December, 1914.

*"It has always been accepted as the most effective form of war to attack and destroy the enemy's strongest forces as soon as possible IF THERE IS A REASONABLE PROSPECT OF SUCCESS. If there is not a reasonable prospect of success the next best course is to weaken the enemy by holding his main forces and attacking his weaker ones, if that be possible. The possibility depends, however, firstly, on being able to hold his main forces, and secondly, on being able to defeat his weaker ones.*

If we were to detach largely to Italy it is probable that we could still hold the Germans on the Western front, *but it is not certain and it would depend much on the French.*

It is at best very uncertain that we could defeat Austria. . . . *A decision to transfer troops to Italy would mean abandonment of our offensive in Belgium. A consequent gain of time to Germany; very dangerous disappointment in France and, to some extent, in Russia; small prospects of success against Austria supported in all probability by German troops; a possibility of reverses on the Western Front; and a possibility of still more serious reverses on the Italian Front.*

*Against all this we have a reasonable chance of success in Belgium which may have greater results than even a bigger success against Austria, and which at least may be expected to open the way for greater results subsequently.*

It is not impossible that Germany aims at inducing us to detach from the Western Front—that is a very usual form of war, often employed with telling effect. But whether she is deliberately trying so to induce us or not there seems no doubt that our wisest and soundest course is to continue to wear down the German forces on the Western Front, as we are undoubtedly able to do."

Lord Curzon asked whether when Sir Douglas Haig spoke of having a reasonable chance of success he merely meant that he expected to capture his first objective.\*

Sir Douglas Haig replied that he referred to the complete operation which he had explained to the Committee on the previous day.

\* That included the capture of Ostend and Zeebrugge.

I said I had no doubt whatsoever about the desirability of *carrying out Sir Douglas Haig's plan if it was reasonably likely to succeed and was practicable.*

General Smuts said that he had had a long talk with the First Sea Lord in order to ascertain what importance he attached to the proposed operations. *Admiral Jellicoe had replied that, in his paper, he had, if anything, understated the case.* He himself had not up till then been aware of the extent to which the Germans could use the bases on the Belgian coast.

The First Sea Lord, Admiral Jellicoe, entered at this point and in reply to Lord Curzon, who asked him to develop the case he had made in the two papers circulated to the Committee, said that two points were in his mind. The first was that immense difficulties would be caused to the Navy if by the winter the Germans were not excluded from the Belgian coast. He could not develop the reasons for this better than he had already done in the papers circulated. *The position would become almost impossible if the Germans realised the use they could make of these facts.*

The second point, he felt, was that if we did not clear the Germans out of Zeebrugge before this winter we should have great difficulty in ever getting them out of it. The reason he gave for this was that *he felt it to be improbable that we could go on with the War next year for lack of shipping.*

I said that the most serious point in *Admiral Jellicoe's remarks was the statement that we could not continue the War next year for lack of shipping.* This statement, made in such a quarter, must be tested. If it was accurate, then we should have far more important decisions to consider than our plans of operations for this year, namely, the best method of making tracks for peace.

I said that I would not have taken up this question unless I had supposed that the *First Sea Lord had gone in detail into the whole question before he made so serious a statement.* It would probably be necessary for the Committee to see the First Sea Lord and the Shipping Controller together on the subject. I then asked the First Sea Lord as to whether the Admiralty were making any progress in the organisation of an offensive section of the Operations Division.

The Committee then adjourned until the following day. During the afternoon the members of the War Committee had a full discussion amongst themselves as to the reply the Government should give to the military chiefs. There was a marked divergence of opinion. General Smuts was strongly of the view that the Generals had made out their case for at least having a good try. Personally, he thought the chances were highly favourable. Lord Curzon inclined in the same direction—but not quite so definitely. Lord Milner, Mr. Bona Law and I thought the project a mistake, when Britain, with practically the only unshaken army, was holding the pass until the



Americans arrived; that it had none of the elements of success, that it would be very costly and that it therefore ought to be discouraged. Mr. Bonar Law did not, however, think we were entitled to overrule the military and naval authorities on a question of strategy. Lord Milner and I also hesitated to go that length especially in view of the fact that the Chief Military Adviser of the Cabinet supported the Commander-in-Chief, and that on the question of accepting the responsibility of vetoing the operation we would have no support in the Cabinet. I had seen Lord Balfour and talked the matter over with him. He was impressed by General Smuts' support of the plan and was also in favour of having a try. It was therefore decided that I should once more sum up the misgivings which most of us felt and leave the responsibility for decision to Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig, on the understanding that if the progress they made with the operation did not realise the expectations they had formed, it should be called off and effective help be rendered to the Italians to press their offensive.

## CHAPTER LXIII (*continued*)

### THE CAMPAIGN OF THE MUD: PASSCHENDAELE

#### 4. CONTINUATION OF DELIBERATIONS: MISREPRESENTATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT

It must be remembered that we were not placed in full possession of facts which would have justified our taking a stronger line. In the course of the discussions that took place between the War Policy Committee of the Cabinet and the Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of the Imperial Staff and the conversations before and after the formal meetings, Ministers were misled on several critical points.

First of all we were misled as to the French attitude towards the offensive. This was vital, for without their active and whole-hearted co-operation the attack could not hope to succeed. When the Germans were almost equal in numbers and superior in artillery to the combined forces of the British and French, an offensive by one of them alone was doomed to failure. On this point the following facts were concealed:—

1. Ministers were told confidentially that the offensive was urged upon us in the first instance by the French as the only means of saving France from collapse, just as pressmen were subsequently informed in confidence that its continuation was attributable to French entreaties that we should keep on fighting. We were not informed that, so far from urging us on, the leading French Generals had done their best to dissuade us, and had stated emphatically that they condemned the project and thought it a foolish venture which must fail. They also made it clear that the greatest service we could render to them would be to take over more of their line. They had conveyed these opinions to Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson. These eminent Generals, in stating their case for the scheme, had concealed these important facts from the Government.

2. The salient facts as to the condition of the French Army and the extent of the demoralisation in its ranks were also withheld or minimised. We were not told that the French plan was to wait for the Americans and meanwhile to increase their equipment, husband the Allied resources and only engage in limited operations not involving heavy casualties, but perhaps also to help the Italians in their offensive. Headquarters having determined in their own minds that the French were inventing or exaggerating their mutinies to shirk

responsibility for action, they felt it would be undesirable to confuse and distract our innocent minds by repeating to us such canards.

3. We were not informed that the new Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, and some of his leading Generals, favoured a combined attack on the Italian Front. Had we known that there was such high authority for this strategical move, the Government might have taken a different view of this alternative to Passchendaele. As to the possibilities of such an offensive, we were misled. We were told positively by Sir Douglas Haig that it was already too late to make the necessary preparations for affording the Italians the assistance they would need to start an offensive on that front. But the Germans made their preparations in September to assist the Austrians to stage the offensive which late in October inflicted the heaviest disaster ever sustained by the Italian Army. And the Allies were able in November in a very short time to throw 200,000 troops and a considerable number of guns into Italy to prevent that disaster from developing into utter collapse.

But even if the French situation had been favourable, there was the question to be considered of the wisdom of undertaking a great offensive before the Americans arrived and the further question of choosing this particular sector for the attack. On these two issues let us first consider the question of the desirability of the British Army this year putting its whole strength into this extensive attack on the German entrenchments in the West, seeing that the Russians were practically out of action, the French were discouraged, and the Americans were not ready.

In order to persuade us that the time was opportune we were told by the Commander-in-Chief that we should have a superiority of two to one in infantry—it was untrue; that the enemy had no effective reserves—that was not in accordance with the facts; that the German morale was so broken that they would not put up anything like the resistance which they had hitherto offered—that was misleading; that they had inaccurate guns and inadequate ammunition—we found otherwise. He minimised the German reserve of man-power and informed the Cabinet that “if the fighting was kept up at its present intensity for six months, Germany would be at the end of her available man-power.” The fighting for the next six months was very much more intense than any hitherto witnessed, and at the end of it Germany was certainly not at the end of her man-power.

Let us next consider the ground selected for these operations. We knew nothing of its specially unsuitable character for operations which involved a heavy bombardment. This turned out to be one of the foremost elements in the failure of the plan. The chosen battlefield was a reclaimed swamp which was only prevented from returning to its original condition of a soggy morass by an elaborate



system of drainage, constantly kept in order by the most careful and constant scouring and repairing of ditches and waterways on the part of the cultivators. Any bombardment of this ground was bound to block and destroy every conduit, with the result that the whole area would be converted once more into an impassable quagmire. Even if the weather conditions had remained favourable, the whole terrain was traversed by a number of little becks which would swell into pools as soon as the culverts were smashed, the banks broken and the channels choked. Such ground was hopeless for tanks, whose effective activities were an essential part of the original plan of a surprise attack. You might as well try to take tanks across the Slough of Despond.

The special conditions which render this tract of country more liable to flooding than the ordinary Flemish land were brought to the notice of G.H.Q. by the Tank Corps some weeks before the battle began. As soon as the Tank Corps were informed that they were expected to operate in that area they instituted inquiries as to the character of the ground. They soon ascertained the fact of its reclamation and of the elaborate system of drainage which alone prevented its reverting to a morass. They knew that under these conditions such a long bombardment as always preceded the infantry advance in all their great offensives would render the ground utterly unsuitable for tank operations. The result of this investigation was sent to Headquarters, but no notice was taken of it. Some time later, the Tank Corps Staff prepared maps to show how a bombardment which obliterated the drainage would inevitably lead to a series of pools, and they located the exact spots where the waters would gather. The only reply vouchsafed to this effort to save the Army from disaster was a peremptory order that they were to "Send no more of these ridiculous maps." Maps must conform to plans and not plans to maps. Facts that interfered with plans were impertinences.

The Chief of Sir Douglas Haig's Intelligence Staff stated that the Commander-in-Chief was himself: —

"anxious about the weather conditions that were to be anticipated. Careful investigations of the records of more than 80 years showed that in Flanders the weather broke early each August with the regularity of the Indian monsoon: once the autumn rains set in, difficulties would be greatly enhanced."\*

The War Committee were not made acquainted with this "careful investigation" of the records and what they portended in the way of "enhanced difficulties," and it will be found that in the whole

\* "Field-Marshal Earl Haig," by Brig.-General Charteris, D.S.O., p. 272.

In his diary, he further adds, "I do not think we can hope for more than a fortnight, or at the best, three weeks of really fine weather."

discussions with the War Committee, not a word was said about the meteorological drawbacks and the peculiar conditions which rendered the terrain of the struggle specially disadvantageous for a sustained attack.

But the most reprehensible suppression of essential information was the withholding from the Government of the fact that all the Generals called into consultation by Sir Douglas Haig had serious misgivings about the whole project and had expressed their doubts to him. The knowledge of that fact would naturally have carried great weight with all the members of the War Committee, and as most of them already entertained serious apprehensions it would have been decisive. No hint was given to us of the fact that the Generals who were in command of the armies which were chosen to carry out the projected offensives shared our hesitation. We know now that the officer who advised the principal attacking army on all artillery questions deprecated the plan on the ground that there would be no elbow room for the artillery to operate. His opinion was passed on to G.H.Q. Of this we knew nothing.

*We were invited to discuss Sir Douglas Haig's plan not merely without full knowledge of the essential elements, but with a definite suggestion that the decisive facts in this and other respects were quite contrary to what they were in reality.*

I do not propose to discuss at this stage the boundaries of the legitimate functions and responsibilities of military experts and Governments respectively for strategy. I will content myself now with the statement that if soldiers, for reasons of their own, wish to commit Governments to a military operation, perfect candour and a complete revelation of all facts and considerations within the knowledge of either soldiers or statesmen which are relevant to sound decision are not only an obligation of honour they owe to each other, but a duty they owe to the country whose interests are committed to their charge. A prospectus issued with a view to inducing the public to invest their capital in an enterprise must reveal all material facts. The Government were the trustees of the public and were asked to invest in this wild military speculation not only hundreds of millions of public money, but the lives of hundreds of thousands of brave men whom they had called to the ranks. More than that, they were invited to risk the fate of Britain on what Sir William Robertson later on called "a gamble," where the truth that mattered was wilfully and skilfully kept from their cognisance. That is a serious charge, and I should certainly not have felt justified in making it, unless there were contemporary records which bear out my indictment. If the whole truth, as it was known at the time to the military staffs, had been exposed before the members of the War Committee, the Flanders offensive would have been turned down.

As it was, we had to judge upon a basis of essential facts suppressed,

distorted and misrepresented. I am therefore not in the least surprised that some of my colleagues came to the conclusion that, upon the case as represented to them, the Flanders offensive had a reasonable chance of achieving considerable success, and that it was at any rate worth trying. The Committee attached great weight to the undertaking given them by both Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig that the attack would be abandoned as soon as it became evident that it was not likely to succeed in its purpose. Even on the facts known to us, I was opposed to the enterprise, and so were the majority of the members of the War Committee, but, for the reasons which I have indicated, they did not think they were justified in accepting the responsibility of imposing a peremptory veto without a test being made of the possibilities of such an attack. I was authorised to make a statement on these lines which would fairly represent our general attitude.

This I did on 21st June. I made a final effort to persuade Haig and Robertson to abandon this foolhardy enterprise. I felt they were plunging into a perilous hazard when the conditions demanded unusual circumspection and preparation of men and equipment for the coming year's final attack on the citadel of the Central Powers. Our officers and men needed training. A few months ago most of them were civilians. And even those who had been at the front for a much longer period had not been afforded leisure and opportunity for learning and teaching the lessons of a war waged by methods of which veterans had no previous experience. The following is a summary of my speech to the War Cabinet Committee: —

I had devoted many hours of anxious consideration to the plans put forward by Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, and supported by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and on the previous evening I had discussed the question very fully with my colleagues. I felt that at this stage it would be desirable to make Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson acquainted with the conclusions which I had reached, and I expressed the hope that they would give careful thought and full weight to the considerations which I was going to place before them. My view was that the responsibility for advising in regard to military operations must remain with the military advisers. Speaking for myself, and I had little doubt that my colleagues agreed with me in this, I considered it would be too great a responsibility for the War Policy Committee to take the strategy of the War out of the hands of the military. This made it more important that the military advisers of the Government should carefully weigh my misgivings as the head of the Government in regard to the advice they had tendered. If, after hearing my views, and after taking time to consider them, they still adhered to their previous opinion, then, subject to the condition they had themselves suggested as to breaking off the attack if it did not work out in accordance



with expectation, we would not interfere and prevent the attempt.

I entreated Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson to remember that a most momentous decision had now to be taken and that a wrong step might bring disaster to the cause of the Allies.

The first point which I raised was that I felt somewhat disturbed at the recent change of attitude on the part of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. I reminded the Committee that at the Paris Conference of 4th and 5th May, I had discussed the question with Sir William Robertson and the latter had himself felt some misgivings in regard to aggressive operations unless the French were able to co-operate with a strong offensive. My own doubts at that time had been due to the collapse in Russia and the consequent ineffectiveness of the Russian Army and the opposition of Generals Alexeieff and Pétain. General Robertson however had expressed the view that if the French would undertake really serious offensive operations, by which he meant some such operations as our own, calculated to hold a fair proportion of the German reserves on the French Front, then he was prepared to agree to an offensive.

Now General Pétain had found himself obliged, for reasons which were really beyond his control, and for which he could not be blamed, to go back on his undertaking. In consequence, there had been no big French offensive operation in concert with the attack on the Messines Ridge. Hence, it appeared to me that Sir William Robertson had made a very serious change in his advice in agreeing to Sir Douglas Haig's plan, which involved the commitment of 42 divisions in an attempt to fight right through to a depth of 20 miles, while the French contented themselves with relatively minor operations further to the south.

I then turned to an examination of the prospects of success. I pointed out that failure would be a very serious business. All the world would recognise if Sir Douglas Haig only succeeded in reaching his first objective, that our operations had failed to realise their full scope. I felt that we were not in a position to play with the disintegrating forces that were operating in all belligerent countries on both sides, but more especially on the side of the Allies, owing to the hopeless position of Russia. Every one would know that we were aiming at a much greater prize than Sir Douglas Haig's first objective and that the real object of our operations was to clear the Belgian coast. Only that morning I had noticed an extract from the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which showed that our intentions were already realised in Germany. In reckoning up our chances of success I pointed out that we must advance 15 miles before we could really begin the first operation for freeing the Belgian coast. What reason, I asked, was there to believe that we could first drive the enemy back 15 miles and then capture a place ten miles away? For a success on this scale one of the following conditions was essential:—

1. An overwhelming force of men and guns;
2. That the enemy should be attacked so strongly elsewhere that his reserves would be drawn off;
3. That the enemy's morale should be so broken that he could no longer put up a fight.

None of the above conditions obtained at that time.

The numerical superiority of the Allies on the Western Front, including 25,200 Portuguese, 18,000 Russians, who were forming Committees and talking revolution, and 131,000 Belgians, did not exceed 15 per cent. More than this, however: the French did not, in their present temper, count as available for any offensive enterprise on a great scale. They were a little out of hand and wanted rest, so that the French Government had been obliged to grant them extended leave. In comparing the value of the French and German soldier, it had to be remembered that the French soldiers represented one out of six of the population, whereas the Germans only included one out of eleven, which must make a difference in quality. The French Army included all kinds of material in the line that were on the ration strength but did not constitute soldiers.

I myself did not pose as an expert in strategy but, nevertheless, I understood that an overwhelming superiority in men and material was agreed by all strategists as essential to success in an offensive, particularly under modern conditions. I agreed that we might very likely make a success of a first attack, but assaults on the German lines were like hitting india-rubber.

I reminded the Committee that during nearly three years of war I had never known an offensive to be undertaken without sure predictions of success. Similar reasons to those given now had always been adduced as to why we should do better than last time, and I had always been told that by applying the lessons of the past we should succeed. This experience had not unnaturally made me feel sceptical. On this occasion I was more especially sceptical, owing to the lack of numerical superiority, to which I had already alluded. I pointed out that in heavy guns we were barely equal to the enemy. It was true that we were told we had a good deal more ammunition than the Germans, but I asked whether the Germans had not ample supplies of ammunition for the defensive. According to my experience, in the present war, something like a superiority of five shells to one was required for the offensive as compared with the defensive. To try and break the enemy's army with no material superiority in men or guns, with no adequate support from the French, with Russia broken, with the Germans able to exchange fresh divisions brought from the Eastern Front for the divisions already shattered on the Western Front—(a point which appeared to me to have been lost sight of in those calculations)—why should we succeed? I asked why

we should anticipate a greater measure of success on this occasion than in the Battle of the Somme, where we had only succeeded in making a dent of five or six miles? Yet our military advisers were just as sanguine then as they were now.

I said I was told that the experience of Arras and Messines rendered success more likely. I agreed that these operations had both been very brilliant. In both, however, there had been an element of surprise. I reminded the Committee, however, that in the case of the Battle of Arras, the main attack was to have been delivered by the French further to the south, and consequently the bulk of the German reserves had been accumulated in front of General Nivelle's main attack. In my view all that the Battle of Arras demonstrated was that with surprise you could obtain an advance of five or six miles. It provided, however, no illustration or proof of what you could do when the Germans were concentrating their main reserves behind their lines, as they would to meet the attack now contemplated. In regard to the Battle of the Messines Ridge, I pointed out that the mines had provided an element of surprise.

The chances, however, were against a success. The cost in human life would be very heavy, and failure would react widely at home and abroad, while the Army would be seriously weakened. For these reasons I urged the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Field-Marshal to pay me the compliment of considering the above case and of giving me an answer, not that day, but after they had taken a few days to think over it.

Concluding this part of my statement, I said that none of my colleagues, whether they were in favour of or opposed to the adoption of Sir Douglas Haig's plan, were sanguine of success.

I then said: The question will be asked: Does this rejection of Sir Douglas Haig's plan mean that we are to do no more fighting on the Western Front? The answer was in the negative. It was not the Committee's business to suggest alternatives, but that of the military advisers. Nevertheless, I would like to ask our military advisers to consider two alternatives.

The first of these was to adopt what might be called the Pétain tactics, namely, a punch here and there and a process of wearing down the enemy by that means. We had plenty of ammunition and could punish the enemy heavily. Having in view the privations of the Germans, the prospect of a big reinforcement from America and of a regeneration of the Russian Army, the enemy, feeling that time was against him, might be considerably damaged and discouraged by such a course.

The second alternative was to undertake an operation which was, in the first place military, and, in the second place, diplomatic, with the object of detaching Austria from Germany, namely, an attack on the Austrian Front.



I felt that the fatal error which had been committed in the present war had been continually to attack where the enemy was strongest. Surely, it was a mistake to deliberately aim our spear against the thickest part of the enemy's armour. If we had made efforts earlier in the War to knock out Austria, we should be in a far better position now. I felt, however, that we had another chance of effecting this. There was not the smallest doubt that Austria was anxious to be out of the War. This was not a matter of conjecture, but of absolute knowledge. Austria, however, was not willing now to pay the price demanded by the Allies, although if another heavy blow were struck against her she might be brought to accept our terms. I pointed out the difficult internal situation of Austria, with about half her population disaffected. I compared it to the position that this country would occupy if Wales, Scotland, and either the South or the East of England had a hostile population, whilst only a patriotic and bellicose core remained in the centre. The account that had reached us of the sessions of the Austrian Chamber showed that the nation was sulky. This appeared to offer a special opportunity for a military and diplomatic success. The prize was far the biggest in sight. If Austria could be forced out of the War, Bulgaria and Turkey would automatically have to go out. No more ammunition could reach Bulgaria and Turkey and both would have to make terms. Next year the whole of the forces now locked up in Salonika, Mesopotamia, and Egypt would be set free for operations on the Western Front. Moreover, Italy would then be bound to support us, for I did not contemplate co-operation with Italy without a bargain that if Austria was reduced to terms, Italy should support us in our attacks against Germany. How then was this result to be accomplished? I then pointed out that the Italians had enormous resources of men, but an insufficiency of guns. The Austrians were unaccustomed to any bombardment on the scale experienced on the Western Front and probably the first time that they were exposed to it they would succumb. Taking into consideration the great Italian preponderance of men, the addition of heavy guns that they lacked should give them a chance of success.

If success was achieved on the Italian Front, I believed that victory in the War was assured. A separate peace with Austria would then be practicable, and having eliminated Austria from the War, Germany would be at our mercy.

I then called attention to the peril we should be in if Russia went out of the War leaving Austria still fighting. It might even endanger the prospect of ultimate victory.

(Sir Douglas Haig, being asked by me at this stage whether he had any hope of victory this year, at once replied that in his view he would have a very good chance of victory this year. Only to-day

he had received information that the German companies were from 50 to 70 strong as compared with an original establishment of 250, that a regiment (German) (163rd) refused to attack on the 18th June, that a proportion of men of the 1919 class were already in the companies at the front, etc.)

I welcomed Sir Douglas Haig's sanguine views, but did not personally attach great importance to this sort of information.

Continuing the main thread of my argument, I stated that I was very seriously alarmed about the Russian situation. Our aim therefore should be to get Austria out. General Delmé-Radcliffe\* had expressed the view that if we sent men and guns to the aid of the Italians, we could secure secrecy as to their movements, and had suggested various expedients for doing so. If the Germans came to the assistance of the Austrians, then you would be fighting them and wearing them out with Italian aid. Up to now, our losses, and those of the French, had been very heavy, but this was not the case with the Italians. It would be the first time that the Italian resources of man-power had been properly utilised to pull their weight in the War. The French and ourselves had no substantial numerical superiority over the Germans, and it would be very advisable for the Allies at last to make use of the great Italian superiority in men.

Lord Curzon remarked that the Italians themselves had entirely failed to make proper use of their great numerical superiority over the Austrians. I pointed out that this was due to the fact that the Italians never had any superiority in gun-fire until their last attack, and on that occasion they had been short of ammunition and had been compelled to break off their attack for this reason. We, however, had the ammunition as well as the guns. I asked the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to take a day or two to think these matters over, and begged him carefully to weigh the points which I had put. Personally, I said, even if my colleagues agreed, I would not be willing to impose my strategical views on my military advisers, but I had felt that I would not be doing my duty if I concealed my great misgivings about the advice they had given. If, after full reflection, they advised against the suggestions I had propounded I would, nevertheless, support them. I felt, however, that we were at the parting of the ways. *I believed that one course would lead to victory and the other course to a hopeless and costly struggle bringing us no nearer victory.*

Sir W. Robertson said that the first note he had made had been to ask to have time to prepare his reply. He and Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig both fully appreciated the great responsibility which lay on me. He agreed that this might be the greatest decision in the War, and he wished to say that neither he nor Sir Douglas Haig resented any of my criticisms or suggestions. He would do his best

\* Our liaison officer with the Italian Army.

to answer the questions, but he pointed out to the Committee that an officer of 41 years' soldiering is bound to base his views partly on military experience and instinct and knowledge of the service, and similar considerations which it was difficult to formulate briefly in writing.

After the conclusion of the meeting I instructed the Secretary to ask Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig to consider the desirability of examining the Italian proposition on the spot in consultation with General Cadorna.

It is, of course, a matter of history that our military advisers, in face of this appeal from me, still decided to adhere to their view as to the feasibility of the Flanders offensive. Could I have gone behind these exalted Commanders and conducted independent investigations on the spot into the facts and conditions? It is a momentous question and should we ever have the misfortune in future to be landed in another war, that problem will arise once more. I deal with it later on when I come to discuss the issue of whether the Government ought not to have peremptorily ordered a breaking off of the battle. I had no expert military counsel which I could weigh against theirs. I was not aware at the time that the French Generals and some of our own Generals thought the attack was a mistake. As I was not aware then that Pétain and Micheler had urged the alternative of an offensive on the Italian Front, I could quote no military opinion in favour of my thesis. Profound though my own apprehensions of failure were, I was a layman and in matters of military strategy did not possess the knowledge and training that would justify me in overriding soldiers of such standing and experience. Accordingly, the soldiers had their way. And it is one of the bitter ironies of war that I, who have been ruthlessly assailed in books, in the Press and in speeches for "interfering with the soldiers" should carry with me as my most painful regret the memory that on this issue I did *not* justify that charge.



## CHAPTER LXIII (*continued*)

### THE CAMPAIGN OF THE MUD: PASSCHENDAELE

#### 5. THE FOUR MONTHS' BATTLE FOR A FRACTION OF THE OBJECTIVE

THE operations were entrusted to the Fifth Army under the command of Sir Hubert Gough. The directions given to him by the Commander-in-Chief were to capture "the Passchendaele-Staden Ridge and the railway Roulers-Thourout." The object was stated to be to "facilitate a landing between the Yser River and Ostend and in combination with a force so landed, to gain possession of the Belgian coast. These directions end with an extraordinary sentence. "*It is open to you . . . to visit the area of the operations.*" Having regard to subsequent developments this permit to view the ground has a sinister import.

The first attack was prefaced by a prolonged and terrific bombardment which thoroughly churned up the soggy ground. A downpour of rain did not improve matters. On the left the first two lines were reached, but not the "green line" which was the ultimate objective of the first day's attack. On the right, little progress was made and the casualties were undoubtedly heavy. The failure on the right was serious. It meant that the further we drove the Germans on the left, the more we should be creating a dangerous salient commanded by artillery planted on the heights to the right. It is to Gough's credit that he pointed this out when the plan was first disclosed to him and that he urged that the Second Army should attack these heights simultaneously with his effort to capture Pilkem. His suggestion was not adopted. The consequence was exactly what he foresaw. The further he advanced, the more did he bring his men under German guns placed on the hills to the right of Passchendaele. Consequently, the losses were very heavy and the difficulties of a further advance were enormously increased by a continuous bombardment from heavy guns which, being on the high ground, had perfect observation of every move down in the swamps. After suffering heavily for several weeks from this obvious disadvantage—that is, obvious to those who were taking part in the fighting, but not to G.H.Q.—the Second Army were ordered, in September, to attack on the right, and they gradually cleared the enemy from these particular heights.

But the reports sent from G.H.Q. on the 31st July revealed no ground for dejection. In fact, the enemy had been driven back at

least a mile on a considerable part of the front, and some battalions had penetrated the enemy line to a depth of two miles. It was at least a greater success than our first attack on the Somme. It was not a repetition of the Vimy Ridge achievement, such as Sir Douglas Haig anticipated in his statement to the War Committee, but the High Command were entitled to claim that two more such battles might enable them to attain at least a portion of the Passchendaele-Clerken Ridge, which constituted the first objective of the campaign. According to their view the capture of the remainder of that crescent of high ground would enable them to dominate the plains on the other side, and to sweep onward with greater ease with the help of "masses of cavalry," to the important railway junction of Roulers. But alas! the next battles were a failure. Practically no progress was made in the costly assaults of August. They were not admitted as such, but nevertheless they were undoubted defeats, by every test that stamps a battle as a victory or a repulse. The August failures were put down to the wet weather. As if it had never rained before in that dripping climate! There is a well-known legend of the sun standing still to enable a battle to be won in the Vale of Ajalon, but there is no legendary precedent which would justify our modern Joshuas in expecting that it would dispel the clouds over the lowlands of Flanders. Here is the rainfall in that country during the years of the War up to and including 1917:—

	July	Aug.	Sept.	Total
1914	124 mm.	40 mm.	75 mm.	239 mm.
1915	74 mm.	107 mm.	65 mm.	246 mm.
1916	98 mm.	71 mm.	78 mm.	247 mm.
1917	104 mm.	106 mm.	16 mm.	226 mm.

These figures show what a reckless gamble it was to risk the life of the British Army on the chance of a rainless autumn on the Flemish coast.\* But even if the rain had been below instead of above the average, as it actually turned out to be, the destruction of the drains would have sufficed to make the ground unfit for military operations. The drenching rains simply helped the broken drains to convert a reclaimed marsh into an impassable quagmire.

Here is a description of the battlefields by a competent observer:—

"After our preliminary bombardment, which lasted for 16 days with ever-growing intensity, and the German retaliation thereto, the whole surface of the ground consisted of nothing but a series of overlapping shell craters, half-full of yellow, slimy water. *Through falling into these ponds hundreds upon hundreds of*

\* Charteris notes in his diary on 4th August: "If it were not that all the records in previous years had given us fair warning, it would seem as if Providence had declared against us."

*unwounded men, while advancing to the attack, lost their lives by drowning.\** The mere act of walking over this tortured swamp, unencumbered by the 60 pounds weight which the soldier carries in action, was one that entailed considerable effort, though one was able to move at one's own pace and choose the easiest routes. The original roads had almost ceased to exist, and, in order to enable wheel traffic to move at all, even in the area behind the line, it was necessary to lay down corduroy tracks which were constantly destroyed by shell fire. Furthermore, at this period, the Germans had established a definite superiority in the air and these tracks and the 'duck-board' walks were daily machine-gunned by low-flying aeroplanes. Every yard of ground had been carefully 'registered' by the enemy's guns, and a peculiarly effective form of gas shell, containing 'mustard-gas' had been evolved. . . .†

Having talked freely to certain officers at Headquarters about the state of the ground, this observer was hauled over the coals by an important member of the Staff for his indiscreet candour, and the following conversation which he records will give an idea not merely of the attitude of G.H.Q. towards disagreeable facts, but of their complete ignorance of what was going on.

"You asked me how things really were and I told you frankly."

"But what you say is impossible."

"It isn't. Nobody has any idea of the conditions up there."

"But they can't be as bad as you make out."

"Have you been there yourself?"

"No."

"Has anybody in Operations Branch been there?"

"No."

The officer adds:—

"I am absolutely convinced that the department responsible for the staging of the Ypres offensive had not the remotest conception of the state of affairs existing and accordingly formulated their plans on a hopelessly incorrect basis. . . .‡

This officer was associated with the tanks. Their assistance had been regarded by G.H.Q. as one of the essentials of success. The ground was utterly unsuited to their movement.

General Baker-Carr's account is confirmed by a statement published by Captain Liddell Hart in his book, "A History of the World War."

\* My italics.

† "From Chauffeur to Brigadier," by Brigadier-General Baker-Carr, Chapter XIV.

‡ *ibid.*, Chapter XIV.



"Perhaps the most damning comment on the plan which plunged the British Army in this bath of mud and blood is contained in an incidental revelation of the remorse of one who was largely responsible for it. This highly-placed officer from General Headquarters was on his first visit to the battle front—at the end of the four months' battle. Growing increasingly uneasy as the car approached the swamp-like edges of the battle area, he eventually burst into tears, crying, 'Good God, did we really send men to fight in that?' To which his companion replied that the ground was far worse ahead. If the exclamation was a credit to his heart it revealed on what a foundation of delusion and inexcusable ignorance his indomitable 'offensiveness' had been based."\*

I could quote written testimony from hundreds of reliable witnesses which would amply corroborate these statements. It is unnecessary to do so, for Sir Douglas Haig himself gives a vivid confirmation in his final dispatch:—

"The low-lying clayey soil, torn by shells and sodden with rain, turned to a succession of vast muddy pools. The valleys of the choked and over-flowing streams were speedily transformed into long stretches of bog, impassable except for a few well-defined tracks, which became marks for the enemy's artillery. . . . To leave these tracks was to risk death by drowning, and in the course of the subsequent fighting both men and pack animals were lost in this way. In these conditions operations of any magnitude became impossible. . . ."

It is true that this was written in December, 1917. But the Staff Officer who was responsible for this passage only visited the ground after the whole fight was over.

Artillery became bogged, tanks stuck in the mire, unwounded men by the hundreds and wounded men by the thousands sank beyond recovery into the filth. It is a comment upon the intelligence with which the whole plan had been conceived and prepared, that after the ridge had been reached it was an essential part of the plan that masses of cavalry were intended to thunder across this impassable bog to complete the rout of a fleeing enemy. For months, hundreds of thousands of British troops fought through this slough. They sheltered and they slept in mud-holes. When they squelched along, they were shot down into the slush; if wounded, they were drowned in the slime: but the survivors still crept and dragged onward for four months from shell-hole to shell-hole, with their rifles and machine-guns choked with Flemish ooze, advancing about a mile a month.

\* "A History of the World War," by Liddell Hart.

General Charteris, in his published diary, records that on 9th August: "The front area now baffles description . . . it is just a sea of mud, churned up by shell-fire."

It was a tragedy of heroic endurance enacted in mud, and the British Press rang with praises of the ruthless courage, untiring calm and undaunted tenacity—of the Commander-in-Chief! It was not the fault of the newspapers. The truth was carefully eliminated from official *communiqués* and Press dispatches from the front. There was a relentless and clever censorship exercised.

The Commander of the attacking Army, General Gough, has himself given a faithful account of the conditions under which his Army was called upon to fight. He thought it so hopeless that in the middle of August he advised Sir Douglas Haig to discontinue.

“The state of the ground was by this time frightful. The labour of bringing up supplies and ammunition, of moving or firing the guns, which had often sunk up to their axles, was a fearful strain on the officers and men, even during the daily task of maintaining the battle front. When it came to the advance of infantry for an attack across the water-logged shell-holes, movement was so slow and so fatiguing that only the shortest advances could be contemplated. *In consequence I informed the Commander-in-Chief that tactical success was not possible, or would be too costly, under such conditions, and advised that the attack should now be abandoned. I had many talks with Haig during these days and repeated this opinion frequently, but he told me that the attack must be continued.*”\*

Gough endeavours to excuse Haig's stubbornness by stating that he had valid reasons for continuing these desperate enterprises, as for instance, the condition of the French Army and the need for engaging the Germans so that they should not deliver a knock-out blow to the Russians. Haig also urged the possibilities of the Germans turning on the Italians. It never occurred to him that the same results might have been better achieved by attacking the enemy on more favourable ground. The Cambrai operation later on revealed alternative possibilities of a more hopeful character, even on his own front. Gough, having received his orders to go on, made another general attack on 22nd August, but he reduced his objectives to those within a short distance from his line. He assigns as his reason for this restricted operation that:—

“It was impossible for the men to go forward over any long distance: my object was to spare the troops to the utmost possible degree, while at the same time complying with my orders from G.H.Q. to the effect that the battle must be continued.”

\* “The Fifth Army,” by General Sir H. Gough, p. 205.

At this very date Haig reported to the Government that: “The time is fast approaching when the enemy will be unable to maintain her armies.”

It must seem incredible to those who have no experience of the tyrannical repression imposed on honest men by professional etiquette, that Gough's entreaty to the Commander-in-Chief that he should break off the attack was never reported to the War Cabinet. Whether Sir William Robertson was told of it, I am not in a position to say. I do not know the limits and bounds of military reticence in these matters. Does it end with the forbidding of communications to civilians, or does it extend to those who are inside the Services, although they may be in a position where knowledge of the true situation is essential to the faithful discharge of their functions? Sir William Robertson ought to have been told, and if he was informed then he was in duty and honour bound to pass on so important a fact to the Government. He and Sir Douglas Haig had given a promise to the Cabinet that they would break off the attacks as soon as it became clear that victory was unattainable. At that time I was pressing Robertson to redeem that promise on exactly the same grounds as were being urged by the General in command of the attacking Army. I failed to persuade him that the time had arrived to call off this offensive, but in discussing the matter he certainly never informed me that the General who was in command of the operations agreed with me. Did he know? If he did not, then it is only right that those who were in his confidence at that date should say so. Haig knew.

Gough, having received his orders from G.H.Q., continued to press on after it had become quite obvious that the object of the campaign was unattainable. He does not seem to have withheld his opinion on that point from the Commander-in-Chief, but he states that:—

"On the 28th (September) Haig held a conference, at which he expressed somewhat optimistic views, and gave the opinion that our repeated blows were using up the enemy's reserves and that we might soon be able to push on with no definite and limited objectives as heretofore. *He thought that it might be possible that tanks and even cavalry could get forward.* . . . From a tactical outlook his hopeful opinion was not justified when one considered the ground, the weariness of our own men, and the stout hearts which, in spite of all, were still beating under the German tunics.

A letter from Plumer to G.H.Q. two days later threw some cold water on these hopes. . . ."

Here indeed was a Commander-in-Chief who had completely lost his balance. General Gough need not wait until he reached the ridge before throwing in "masses of cavalry." The time had already arrived for the great charge which was to ride down the beaten foe with irresistible fury and scatter them along the plains of Belgium as the Prussian squadrons had chased the flying rabble of Napoleon's broken army after the rout of Waterloo.



I shall be interested, when Sir Douglas Haig's Memoirs appear, to find whether that important letter from General Plumer throwing cold water on these frenzied expectations will be included amongst the documents. It was not communicated to the Government. Did Robertson know of its existence? Haig knew.

I know now that all the Generals engaged in this battle were opposed to its continuance and were convinced that its objectives were unattainable. Sir Douglas Haig alone retained his faith in the merits and ultimate triumph of his project. In his opinion the Generals on the spot were too readily discouraged by reports pouring in as to the difficulties of the terrain. He also had his reports which dwelt on the more cheerful material that came in from the front. It is true that they came from men that had never seen the battlefield. Their admirable poise was not upset by contemplation of its gruesome realities.

There were two courses open to Sir Douglas Haig. One was to go to the Cabinet and admit that the campaign was a complete failure based on an absurd miscalculation of essential facts. He would have to own up that the criticism directed against the scheme by the Prime Minister had been justified by the event. The other course was to persevere stubbornly with his attacks, knowing that at the worst he would gain some ground, with a chance that one day the enemy morale might break and that opportunity would then come for exploiting a defeat. He gambled on the latter chance rather than face the dread alternative of a confession of failure to the politicians who had deposed Lord French for a less stupendous error of judgment at Loos.

I was trying at this date to persuade Robertson and Haig that the conditions had arisen which made it imperative that they should carry out their undertaking to the Cabinet to break off the attack whenever it became clear that it could not succeed. Had they told me that all the Generals responsible for the actual fighting were of that opinion, the Cabinet would have issued a peremptory order. Its members were not prepared to do so in the absence of any authentic military support for so unprecedented a proceeding. Haig's and Robertson's only answer to my plea was the exceptionally wet August. When the weather improved, the ground would solidify and progress would be easier. The weather did improve in September, but the ground got gradually worse, if that were possible, and General Gough says that, after fighting through the driest September for many years—

“ the state of the ground had been frightful since the 1st August, but by now it was getting absolutely impossible. *Men of the strongest physique could hardly move forward at all and became easy victims to the enemy's snipers. Stumbling forward as best*

*they could*, their rifles also soon became so caked and clogged with mud as to be useless."

This was the terrain over which Haig ordered that tanks should be driven and cavalry were to charge, without any limit to their objective. Infantry could barely "stumble forward" but horsemen could gallop along! Gough's summing-up of the battlefield is very vivid. Here is a sentence:—

"Many pens have tried to describe the ghastly expanse of mud which covered this water-logged country, but few have been able to paint a picture sufficiently intense."

During the exceptionally dry spell in September some successes of a limited character were scored, fractions of a mile captured each time with a few prisoners. There is no doubt that up to about the middle of September the incessant and severe fighting, together with the terrific bombardment, and the reckless disregard of casualties incurred by the attacking troops in an advance, were making an impression on the German Army. Never had there been such a deluge of explosives. It poured for 40 days and 40 nights, without a moment's cease. It is computed that during this time we fired over 25,000,000 shells. Never had there been a more persistent indifference to losses in men and officers. Our men advanced against the most terrible machine-gun fire ever directed against troops in any series of battles, and they fell by the thousands in every attack. But divisions were sent on time after time to face the same slaughter in their ranks, and they always did their intrepid best to obey the fatuous orders. When divisions were exhausted or decimated, there were plenty of others to take their places. Ludendorff admits in his book that owing to defective tactical arrangements it was for him till well into September a period of great anxiety, and that at some points his troops were no longer displaying the firmness which he had hoped for. He then changed his defensive tactics, and afterwards he soon came to the conclusion that the position was completely re-established and that he was safe. But we still went on hammering, making some apparent, but no real progress except in the dispatches from the front. These rang out peal after peal of swelling triumph.

## CHAPTER LXIII (*continued*)

### THE CAMPAIGN OF THE MUD: PASSCHENDAELE

#### 6. THE TACTICS OF DECEPTION

WHILE the ghastliness I have inadequately summarised was proceeding, and brave men were being sacrificed to the stubborn infatuation of the High Command, the public at home, official and unofficial, were all dosed day by day with tendentious statements about victories won, and progress made towards more assured and even greater triumphs. Enemy depression became as deep and his morale as quaky as the bogs of Passchendaele. We were assured that the German peace manœuvres were the indications and expedients of despair. In her fear of the approaching crash, Germany was appealing now to the Socialists, then to Kuhlmann, and again to the Pope, to sue for peace in a hurry. The reports passed on to the Ministers were, as we all realised when it was too late, grossly misleading. Victories were much overstated. Virtual defeats were represented as victories, however limited their scope. Our casualties were understated. Enemy losses became pyramidal. That was the way the military authorities presented the situation to Ministers—that was their active propaganda in the Press. All disconcerting and discouraging facts were suppressed in the reports received from the front by the War Cabinet—every bright feather of success was waved and flourished in our faces. Early in October we were officially informed that the British casualties up to the 5th October were 148,470, whilst the German casualties were 255,000. We know now that the British casualties were already almost twice the number then given to the Cabinet, and that the total German casualties opposite the whole of the British Front for the last five months of the year, only aggregated 270,701.

Every disquieting fact was explained away without any difficulty. If anyone pointed out that the prisoners captured were few, and those mostly wounded, there was a ready and complete explanation given by the C.I.G.S. It was stated that on account of the nature of the ground, the Germans had no dug-outs as they had at Vimy, so they were pounded to death on the surface by our terrible bombardment before our troops had the opportunity of catching them alive. The enormous (estimated) German casualties were referred to as a proof of this. If we expressed doubts about the number of guns captured in



comparison with Arras, then we were told that the Germans planted their artillery on the ridge, well behind the pill-boxes. We would get these guns right enough when the ridge fell into our hands.

The statements about German morale were sometimes grotesque in the gullibility they displayed. The C.I.G.S. came in one day with the statement that "fires had been observed in the Lille area; that the Germans were burning some villages to the north of that town; that this might be preliminary to a withdrawal in that region, where their present line was dominated by the Messines Ridge."

Another day came another cock-and-bull story about indications that the Germans were making arrangements to withdraw from another part of the line, which Sir William Robertson regarded as a "proof that they were preparing for emergencies." The German Armies were visibly cracking under the hammer blows of Haig. We must keep on. To faint or to falter now would be to throw away the chance of finally destroying the foe, when we were daily tightening our grasp on that chance.

It may be said that we must have been a very simple lot to have been taken in by all this selected trash. Politicians are liable to be attacked from every flank—simultaneously. They are suspicious, subtle, crafty and designing, and at the same time they are gullible, simple and foolish. In this case we were not taken in, but our means of ascertaining the facts were blocked by the complete co-operation that existed between the War Office and G.H.Q. We were dependent as to the number of casualties on both sides on reports picked and winnowed by G.H.Q., who were bent on making a case for continuing the offensive. These reports were sent on, not to us, but to the C.I.G.S., whose view was that Haig must be supported at all costs and that (whatever he might say privately to his intimates) the Western Front must not be discredited in the hearing of its detractors. Could we then have gone behind these potentates and in the middle of the battle conducted an inquisition into the methods of the High Command, encouraging officers and men to tell us what they thought of their superiors? We had before our eyes the example of the semi-public intervention of the French in the case of the Nivelle offensive. Some of the most distinguished Generals in the French Army were opposed to that offensive. Some of the ablest Generals in our own Army were doubtful of the wisdom of initiating and pursuing this offensive. But there was a vital difference in the two cases. The dissentient French Generals communicated their doubts frankly to the Government. Our Generals imparted their views to the Commander-in-Chief, but never whispered one hint of their hesitation to any politician. One of them afterwards informed me that had I asked him the question at the time, he would have placed loyalty to his Commander first. The Nivelle precedent had its drawbacks. It stopped that attack, but came dangerously near to fomenting

general mutiny in the French Army. The result was almost fatal to the cohesion and confidence of the French Army. It put it out of effective action for months. We could not risk a repetition of that experiment at this time. The British Army was then the one Allied Army in the field which could be absolutely relied upon for any enterprise, however hazardous and arduous it might be. We could not take any chances with it. It is said that I ought to have taken the risks and stopped the carnage. Let me confess that there were, and still are, moments when I am of the same opinion. But let those who are inclined to condemn me and the War Cabinet for not taking the hazard, weigh carefully and fairly the conditions at that time.

Passchendaele could not have been stopped without dismissing Sir Douglas Haig. Sir William Robertson would have resigned. Had both disappeared without any preliminary fuss which would have rattled the Army, there would have been a sense of relief amongst all the fighting men from one end of the line to the other. But I could not have done it without the assent of the Cabinet. I sounded the Members of the Cabinet individually on the subject and I also spoke to some of the Dominion representatives. They—or most of them—were under the spell of the synthetic victories distilled at G.H.Q.

Nowhere was there a more ecstatic belief in these imaginary victories than at the château and village where the Field-Marshal and his Staff were quartered.

I visited General Headquarters some time about the end of September. I found there an atmosphere of unmistakable exaltation. It was not put on. Haig was not an actor. He was radiant. He was quiet, there was no swagger. That was never one of his weaknesses, but he had the satisfied and confident demeanour of a leader who was marching his army step by step surely and irresistibly, overcoming all obstacles, including good advice from Gough and Plumer and the Prime Minister, forward to the penultimate triumph of the War. This time it was purely his own. The politicians had tried to thwart his purpose. His own commanders had timidly tried to deflect him from his great achievement. He magnanimously forgave us all. He received me hospitably and pleasantly, without any of the humiliations of Canossa. The French could claim no share in this victory, which was breaking the might of the great army of Germany and leaving it a nervous wreck to be finally disposed of in 1918. Something must be left for the Americans, otherwise they would be disappointed.

General Charteris, who was an embodiment of the Military Intelligence which he directed, glowed with victory. For him the news was all good. If there were any elements that might have caused doubt in more discriminating minds, at least General Charteris had not discerned them. And if he had, he was proof against their maleficent influence. He could not help his hopeful

reports. His computations were not mathematical, but temperamental. From the mass of information that came into his office he chose his facts and figures by attraction and not reflection. He could only be caught by a bright fly. That he swallowed up to the gut.

It naturally pleased Haig to have carefully-chosen and nicely-cooked little titbits of "intelligence" about broken German divisions, heavy German casualties, and diminishing German morale served up to him every day and all day. He beamed satisfaction and confidence. His great plan was prospering. The whole atmosphere of this secluded little community reeked of that sycophantic optimism which is the curse of autocratic power in every form. At Chantilly, the same kind of thing blunted the native shrewdness of Joffre and turned the head of Nivelle. It blinded the Czar to the approach of the menacing icebergs that were converging towards his golden barque and ultimately crushed it like matchwood.

When the time came to review Passchendaele, Sir William Robertson attached most of the blame to these reports.

As for General Kiggell, the Chief of Staff, he had the air of a silent craftsman, whose plans, designed and worked out by his art in the seclusion of his workshop, were turning out well and proceeding inexorably without a hitch to the destined end.

During this visit, Sir Douglas and his Staff dwelt repeatedly on the visible deterioration in the physique and smartness of the German soldiers, judged by the specimens captured in recent victories. I expressed a desire to see them. The proposition was received without any enthusiasm. Would I not prefer to see the Vimy Ridge where I could get a view of the German positions? I preferred to see the last batch of German prisoners. I saw the last "cage," and I thought the men were a weedy lot. They were deplorably inferior to the manly samples I had seen in earlier stages of the War. It was some years after the War that I ascertained on authority which is unimpeachable, that on that occasion G.H.Q. rang up Fifth Army and stated that the Prime Minister was coming down and would go to Corps Headquarters to see German prisoners. Instructions were given to inform the Corps—I forget which one it was—of this, and to tell them to see that able-bodied prisoners were removed from the Corps cages.

Whether that message was passed on to the appropriate quarters, I have no direct evidence. But this I do know, that the prisoners I saw did not comprise any "able-bodied specimens." I feel certain that the Commander-in-Chief had no part in this disreputable endeavour to deceive the Chief Minister of the Crown. But it was all in keeping with the effort made to create an impression that although the Belgian coast was not as yet much nearer, those who stood between us and that objective did not possess the requisite quality to bar the way much longer against our tremendous onslaughts.

This is the visit to which I have already alluded in the chapter on



the Kuhlmann peace overtures, and which I paid in order to ascertain the views of the Commander-in-Chief on the situation. A few quotations from this estimate will give an idea of the attitude of exaggerated optimism with which he viewed his achievements in the battle which was then in progress.

"At the present moment there are 147 German divisions on this front, of which 135 have been driven from their positions or withdrawn, broken by their losses since the 1st April, 1917—many of them twice and some three times. No less than 77 of these divisions have been thus overcome—several more than once—during this period by the British Armies. I quote this as a proof of what our armies are capable of.

Our offensive in front of Ypres continues to make good progress. The enemy is undoubtedly considerably shaken and the ground we have already gained gives us considerable advantages and renders us less dependent on weather in following up our success further. Our troops are elated and confident; those on the enemy's side cannot but be depressed and we have good evidence of it.

In the circumstances it is beyond question that our offensive must be pursued as long as possible. I have every hope of being able to continue it for several weeks still and of gaining results which will add very greatly to the enemy's losses in men and morale, and place us in a far better position to resume an offensive in the spring.

Amongst other advantages, we shall end this year's campaign with practically all the observation points originally held by the enemy in our possession—a very important consideration.

The considerable wastage imposed on the enemy by a continued offensive may be expected to leave at the end of the year but a small balance, if any, of the 500,000 men in the reserves he now has available, and he is likely to commence the new year with only some 500,000 to 600,000 reserves at his disposal, including the whole of the 1920 class, which, judging by experience of the 1918 class, will be of low fighting value. At the normal rate of wastage, therefore, since the 1921 class will not be fit to take the field next year, the enemy's man-power will be running out next May or June at the latest. This is a factor of first-rate importance, and no alleviation in this respect would be gained by a return of prisoners from Russia if the latter should make peace, since this would be far more than counter-balanced by the loss of the great numbers of Russian prisoners now available for labour in Germany."

Then came the usual stuff from the Charteris still-room about the inferior quality and the shattered condition of the German divisions:—

"Nineteen of the German divisions now on this front are of poor quality, only fit for the defensive on quiet fronts; 135 of the remainder have already suffered heavy defeats this year and that number will be increased in the next few weeks. Of the 179 German divisions, therefore, the value of at least 154 (135 + 19) must be written down considerably.

The German forces are being replaced now in large proportion by quite inferior material and the proportion of such material in the German ranks will increase rapidly in the future, while, by May or June, the German reserves will be exhausted."

If anyone wants to understand the conditions under which we were called upon to judge appropriate action, let him examine the back-numbers of any of the journals of that date.

There was an elaborate and sustained effort to create an atmosphere of impending victory on an eventful scale. The reports from the Front, official and unofficial, became rosier and ruddier. G.H.Q. could not capture the Passchendaele Ridge, but it was determined to storm Fleet Street, and here strategy and tactics were superb. The Press correspondents at the front were completely enveloped and important publicists and newspaper proprietors in this country were overwhelmed. Lord Northcliffe had, ever since 1916, been the mere kettledrum of Sir Douglas Haig, and the mouth-organ of Sir William Robertson.

The *Times* reports were therefore ecstatic.

In September there was a fierce battle in which we advanced about 1,000 yards into the enemy's defence zone on a limited front. We took about 3,000 prisoners, but there is nothing to show that we captured any guns. Our losses were heavy. The report of the *Times* special correspondent is strikingly headed:—

#### "GERMAN DEFENCE BROKEN"

In his dispatch he says that—

"in this battle we have broken the elaborate scheme of defence which was the last blossom and ultimate triumph of German strategists. This is, from the strategic point of view, the most signal triumph of this attack. It is not merely that it is ground of the first importance that we have taken, or the number of German regiments we have shattered, *but we have broken, and broken at a single blow*, in the course of some three or four hours, the German system of defence."

All that happened was that we had with heavy casualties pushed back the enemy less than two-thirds of a mile on a narrow front. The ridge, which was the first objective of the battle, was after weeks of

sanguinary fighting still in the possession of the Germans, and most of it remained in their possession when the C.-in-C. finally called off the fight. We had therefore to win another "shattering victory," pushing the enemy back another kilometre, picking up another 3,000 of his wounded in the recovered ground. We again utilised this captured post as a starting point in the first week in October for still another smashing triumph a few hundred yards ahead.

This last battle, which produced no tactical, let alone strategical, results of any importance, was hailed in the *Times* as "the most important British victory of the year." It adds:—

"In short, the particular task which Sir Douglas Haig set his armies, has been very nearly accomplished."

We had captured two or three kilometres of the ridge *which Sir Douglas Haig had informed us was the first objective in his big drive.*

As a matter of fact, the whole of the ten weeks' ghastly struggle had not given him, up to and including this last fight, one-sixth of his first objective.

The *Times* has two leading articles on successive days on the Broodseinde victory, as it was called. Who remembers the name now? (Try it on one of your friends.) In each of these leading articles the *Times* waxes lyrical over the result. It assures its readers that "our object is already secured." The British public were congratulated on the fact that at last we were in sight of Bruges. They were not told that this city was 15 miles off, nor were they reminded that the Germans had been in sight of Ypres, only two miles off, for over three years. It extols the way in which Sir Douglas Haig was winning back what was lost in the First Battle of Ypres:—

"with a tenacity and a calm, unhurried persistence which compel the admiration of the world. . . .

With each successive stride the arrangements grow more exact, the results more certain, the losses lighter."

But the *Times* correspondent did not constitute the whole of the orchestra. There were other minor players.

Sir Philip Gibbs throws some light upon the difficulties of a War Correspondent in the introduction to a reprint from his dispatches at the front. As it appeared at a time when he was still a War Correspondent, it is phrased with considerable restraint.

"There is no criticism in this book, no judgment of actions of men, no detailed summing up of success or failure. That is not within my liberty or duty as a correspondent with the Armies in the Field."

All the same, his sense of duty to the public who were looking to him for a truthful account of what their sons and brothers and



husbands were passing through in the battlefield did not prevent his suppressing every check or repulse, and exaggerating with unbridled extravagance every trifling advance purchased at a terrible cost (the latter also suppressed). Here are some of the phrases from a description by him of a battle that drove the enemy back for three-quarters of a mile on a limited front, with a capture of 3,000 prisoners, a large number of whom, according to him, were purely wounded men left on the battlefield, and just a few guns. His jubilant report describes this as:—

“ . . . a smashing blow, the most smashing defeat we have inflicted on the enemy, a complete victory. . . . ”

Referring to the enemy he adds:—

“ We have him beat. One of the greatest victories we have had in the War.”

He even gave the impression that the succession of victories won in Flanders might shortly lead to the attainment of a victorious peace. Here is a choice example of the kind of ecstatic reporting to which we were subjected:—

“ One of the prisoners, a professor . . . thinks ‘ it will not be long before Germany makes a great bid for peace by offering to give up Belgium. By mid-winter she will yield Alsace-Lorraine; Russia will remain as before the War; except for an autonomous Poland; Italy will have what she has captured; and Germany will get back some of her colonies,’ he thinks.”\*

Whether he himself talked to this accommodating don or whether the information was supplied to him as a titbit by the “ Intelligence ” Department, is not clear. All we know now is that as a result of this “ smashing defeat of the enemy ” nothing happened except the capture of a ruined village, and preparations for more victories of the same sort, all of them announced in turn as “ triumphs of unparalleled magnitude.” Whilst this triumphal crawl through the mud was proceeding, Ludendorff was sending divisions to Russia to capture Riga and to the Italian Front to help Austria.

The fighting went on until the first week in December. When it was finally concluded, the attack had completely failed in all the purposes for which it was originally designed. We had not cleared the Flemish coast. We had not broken through the enemy’s defences into open country. The cavalry charge had not come off. Not a single cavalry horse had wetted his hooves in the slush. If the reader will refer back to the plan of attack, he will understand better how

\* “ From Bapaume to Passchendaele, 1917,” by Sir Philip Gibbs, p. 320.

this dreadfulness had ended in an utter fiasco. He will see marked on that map the stages by which we were to reach our final objective. The Passchendaele-Staden Ridge was only the first stage. At its utmost limit it was only five miles from where we started. The last objective was 25 miles distant. The ridge which constituted the first stage in our advance was 18 miles in length. After over four months' terrible fighting, resulting in casualties which reached nearly 400,000 and an enormous expenditure of ammunition—the greatest blaze of high explosives ever yet fired on any battlefield—we had only captured five miles of the ridge, that is about a fourth of our first line of projected advance. To achieve our full aim, we had several more lines to attack and get through. During the whole battle we recovered less ground, we took fewer prisoners, we captured fewer guns (about one-fourth) than we did in the despised Nivelles offensive, and that with nearly three times the casualties we sustained in that operation, which was always alluded to by the Staff as a "failure."

When it was realised some time in September that a breakthrough was impracticable and that the clearing of the Flemish coast this year was out of the question, G.H.Q. substituted the policy of "wearing down the enemy" as the primary purpose of their strategy. How did that thrive? We lost 400,000 men in our direct and subsidiary attacks. The enemy did not lose on the whole British Front during that period 250,000 men. Our losses were nearly five to every three of the Germans. In their Verdun offensive, the Germans had the excuse that they were slaying five Frenchmen for every three they lost. We could not claim that measure of justification for our persistence in the Passchendaele folly. The balance of attrition, which was already heavily in favour of the enemy, was, by this offensive, tipped still more definitely in his favour. The French and the British between them had sustained casualties since the War began which aggregated over five millions. Against this, the enemy loss in fighting us was three millions. I learn that an elaborate effort is being made to gerrymander the casualty returns—both British and German—so as to present a more favourable balance sheet for this adventure. Such a proceeding is dishonest, whether it be historical or commercial, and whatever the nature and whoever the person that inspires it. The fact that it conforms to the spirit of dispatches that announced a series of glorious victories when the sum total was a wretched disaster is no more a justification for the historian than it would be for an auditor who put forward as a plea for cooking the accounts the fact that he was doing so in order to preserve the continuity of the directors' reports. That is not an unknown practice where the public have to be misled as to the extent of the deficit. The losses must be cut down, the gains overstated so as to show a profit on the concern.

So much for the bovine and brutal game of attrition on the Western

Front. On the Eastern Front, it was ending in millions of Russian and hundreds of thousands of Roumanians quitting the battlefield.

It was all a terrible miscalculation. Those who were responsible for planning and persisting in the plan when it had failed, were no men of imagination. All that quality was concentrated in the information bureau. The planning department were conspicuous devoid of it. In the absence of this rare gift there ought to have been a meticulous examination of the ground and a careful and honest survey of the enemy's resources in men and munitions. Unfortunately, the General Officer who prepared the plans for attack after attack across kilometres of untraversable quagmire, and the General who had control of what was by a strange irony called "Intelligence," and whose business it was to sift all the information that came in, and to prepare the reports upon which plans were based never themselves got near enough to the battlefield to see what it was like. They worked on the basis of optimistic reports in the shelter of a remote château, out of sight of the mud and far from the sound of the deadly clatter of the machine-guns. Where draft plans had been submitted, received and approved, the fatal ink which in a few days would be converted into blood, set forth orders and instructions which were not smudged by a drop of the devastating rain that drowned the wounded warriors who fell in a vain attempt to realise these paper dreams. If General Headquarters received any reports as to the conditions under which the men were asked to attack, those reports were never passed on to the War Council. Were they presented to the Commander-in-Chief? Gough told him something of the realities. But Haig was not a man to encourage discouraging reports.

A great deal of the catastrophe is due to the change effected by modern methods of warfare in the opportunities and therefore in the personal risks and responsibilities of Commanders. At Waterloo Napoleon and Wellington could see the whole battlefield with their eyes, and with the help of field-glasses almost every hump and hollow. Even then Napoleon overlooked the sunken road.

But in modern warfare, the more important the General, the less he feels it to be his duty to see for himself what the battlefield is like. Wellington's Generals were on the field amongst their troops. No General in this War—and these remarks apply to every army in the field on both sides—was expected to visit no-man's-land until the battleground had been made safe for "brass hats" by the retreat of the enemy to an invisible distance. Some of them courted danger to inspire their troops and to view the ground for themselves, and in doing so, several fell. But the rule was that Generals no longer led but sent their troops into action. This transformation may have been inevitable owing to the magnitude and the character of the operation and also owing to the increased power and range of the weapons used.



But the increase in the danger factor cannot be pleaded in defence of so revolutionary a change. Admirals share risks with their sailors in a sea-fight. The departure from time-honoured ideas as to the duty of personal observation is due either to an exaggerated estimate of the importance of the individual General, or to an under-estimate of the qualities of the officers available to take the places of superiors in rank who have fallen. The price paid in this War for immunity to Generals was prodigious. No one suggests that it is the duty of Generals to lead their men up to the barbed wire, through the mud, whilst machine-guns are playing upon them. But, had men high up in military rank, ordering or continuing an offensive, been obliged by the exigencies of duty to view for themselves something of the character of the terrain of attack and the nature of the operation they were ordering their officers and men to undertake, the fatuous assaults of the Somme, Monchy, Bullecourt, the Chemin des Dames and Passchendaele would never have occurred; or at any rate one such experience would have been enough.

It is not for me to express an opinion as to whether the change which has taken place in the duties and dangers of Generals is justified. This comment, however, I am entitled to make. If Generals are no longer under any necessity to join their men in an attack or even to go within the zone of fire, it is more incumbent upon them than ever to exercise the greatest care in ascertaining the kind of task they call upon their officers and men to carry through. Apart from good generalship, the obligations of comradeship and of common decency demand it. The men who persisted in the Passchendaele assaults could not have known the conditions under which their orders had to be executed. It is an insult to their intelligence, let alone their humanity, to believe otherwise. I have quoted reputable evidence to prove that some of them had no idea of the actual state of the ground which they commanded tanks and troops to cross. Gough knew and passed his knowledge on to Haig. It seems to have made no impression on the latter's obsessed mind. His apologists quote his obduracy as a proof of the sublime courage that disdained obstacles and dangers. The fact that they were obstacles and dangers which had to be faced only by others and not himself would not, I feel sure, weigh with him. Had he been a humble officer he would have faced them without quaking. No one ever cast a doubt on his personal courage. But it demanded a much higher courage to own up that he had been guilty of a grave error of judgment—that the operation he had planned was an impossible one—that, in fact, he had been wrong and the subordinate generals and interfering politicians had been right.

Thus G.H.Q. never witnessed, not even through a telescope, the attacks it ordained, except on carefully prepared charts where the advancing battalions were represented by the pencil which marched

with ease across swamps and marked lines of triumphant progress without the loss of a single point. As for the mud, it never incommoded the movements of this irresistible pencil.

No wonder that nothing daunted a Staff working under such conditions. They could afford to be the very incarnation of ruthlessness and vicarious heroism: the gods of war, not on the battlefield but in their temple.

I was privileged, whilst this horrible battle was proceeding, to have a talk with one of Haig's most prominent military advisers, who afterwards owned that he had no idea of the conditions under which the battle was fought. I entreated him once more to reconsider the prospects of this venture in the light of what had actually happened. But he also was imbued with the relentlessness of his Chief. He treated me as a stupid civilian who knew nothing of war. When I alluded to the terrible casualties, he reminded me in Hotspur strain that you could not expect to make war without death and wounds. When I pointed to the wet season which had soaked the ground and made it unfit for the passage of tanks, artillery, or men, he said: Battles could not be stopped like tennis matches for a shower. Here again was Mars, but, I thought, Mars under an umbrella.

As to the effect upon the enemy's morale, no doubt they suffered heavy losses in this protracted struggle. It is contended by the apologists of Passchendaele that they lost heavily in officers. As a matter of fact, their casualties in officers were not comparable to ours. We lost a total of 17,000—seven officers to every two of theirs. The loss to them was a serious one. Much more serious was the loss in officers and N.C.O.'s for us, for the Germans had a much larger proportion of men with a long army training to draw upon for making up this deficiency than we had. As to the casualties amongst the N.C.O.'s, officers know well how much they depend upon the experience and shrewdness of their chevroned assistants. The loss in N.C.O.'s was irreplaceable. The best answer to the claim put forward that the enemy had been shattered either in spirit or in reserves, is that when the attack was at its hottest and we were boasting that the German reserves had been almost exhausted, Ludendorff detached some divisions for an attack on Riga; and when we were exultant over the winning of what we regarded as a decisive victory at Broodseinde, his response to our pæans was to send five German divisions to Austria to start a crashing offensive against the Italians. And when we thought that their last reserves had been sent away to save Austria, the Germans found 14 divisions on the Western Front to smash up our offensive at Cambrai. It means that at the moment that we were claiming that we had succeeded in breaking through the German defence system, the German High Command were confident that our whole offensive was an assured failure, and they acted on that assumption.

## CHAPTER LXIII (*continued*)

### THE CAMPAIGN IN THE MUD: PASSCHENDAELE

#### 7. CONSEQUENCES OF PASSCHENDAELE

No soldier of any intelligence now defends this senseless campaign; certainly not one who is not implicated by some share of responsibility for it.

As I have already pointed out in the previous chapter, not even the first objective of the campaign had been attained. The fight came to be known as the "Battle of Passchendaele," but the capture of this village gave us only one-fourth of the first ridge which the Army had to occupy as a starting point. It left the Army with a narrower salient than the deadly salient of Ypres which had already cost us so much. The enemy still surrounded it on three sides, and at some points their lines were nearer to ours than they had been to Ypres before the battle began. Soon after the termination of the campaign, Headquarters realised that at an expense of 400,000 men, they had only forced the British Army into a more dangerous position than it was in before the battle commenced. On 13th December, G.H.Q. issued one of the most remarkable documents which ever emanated from a victorious staff. It constitutes such a comment upon the great triumph that I quote textually from it:—

"... the following special instructions are issued as a guide to the manner of dealing with the Flesquières and Passchendaele salients.

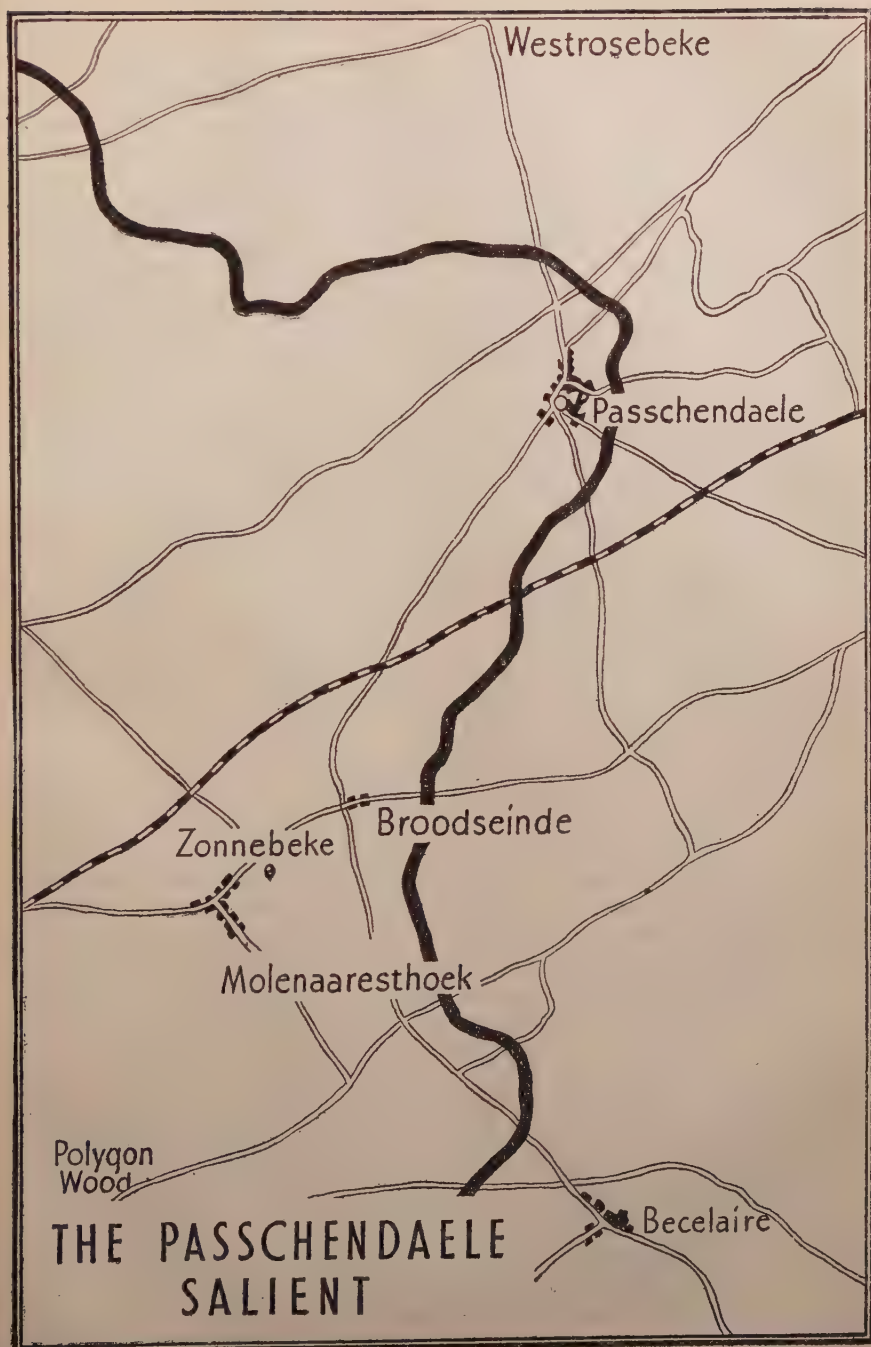
*These salients are unsuitable to fight a decisive battle in. It is, however, desirable to retain possession of them if they are not attacked in great force; and in the event of attack in great force to use them to wear out and break up the enemy's advancing troops as much as possible before these can reach our battle zone of defence which will be sited approximately as a chord across the base of each salient.*

In accordance with this policy the salients will be held firmly until the battle zone of defence behind each has been prepared. The defences of the salients will then be organised into advanced or 'outpost' zones, and as these defences become more complete, so the garrisons can be reduced to what is required for the purpose in view."





THE YPRES  
SALIENT



I need hardly say that this document was withheld from the War Cabinet. And no wonder, for it constitutes a written admission by G.H.Q. that the only strategical or tactical result it achieved by the terrible fighting which very nearly broke the British Army, was the establishment of salients which were "unsuitable to fight a decisive battle in" and which could not be retained if they were "attacked in great force." And the advice is given that they should follow the tactics pursued by the German Army of organising their defence in such a way as to make the enemy pay for all the ground he recovered. As a matter of fact, when the anticipated attack came, in April of the following year, the enemy recovered the whole of the precious ground, after a few hours' fighting and with comparatively slight losses.

The Passchendaele fiasco imperilled the chances of final victory. Had it not been for the effect of the blockade on the morale of the German people, the disappointment caused by the failure of the submarine campaign, combined with the arrival of the American troops in France in swelling numbers, the failure of the Flanders offensive in 1917 might well have been fatal to Allied prospects in 1918. It weighed down the balance of man-power still further to the side of the Central Powers. The desertion of Russia and the defeat of Roumania had already created an adverse balance. The gigantic casualties of Passchendaele pressed down the Allied end of the grisly scales appreciably. Our military leaders had acquired the habit of prodigality in their expenditure of life.

One of the unavoidable evils of war is that it tends to become an orgy of increasing extravagance. Gladstone, who tried to run the Crimean War economically, thereby provided an excuse for military negligence which created one of the worst military scandals in history. Sir Michael Hicks Beach's initial frugality prolonged the Boer War. In this war the skimping policy of the Indian Government ended in conditions in Mesopotamia which exceeded the horrors of Scutari. It is difficult in war to hold the balance even between parsimony and profusion. By the third year of this war everyone concerned was thinking in millions. The small Army of just over a hundred thousand was to-day contemptible in size to British Generals. We had already called over 5,000,000 men to the colours. Shells which numbered thousands in 1914 were fired by the million in a single battle in 1917. The first attack on the Passchendaele slope used up about five million shells, but the supply flowed in at the rate of millions a month. We were all shocked by the casualty list of Neuve Chapelle in the spring of 1915. Compared with the offensives that followed, the Neuve Chapelle losses were insignificant. But these casualties, which had already run into millions, had all been replaced. The British Army that entered upon the Flanders campaign was larger than that which had started the Somme fight,



although meanwhile its losses had considerably exceeded the million.

Wellington's reply to those who wished him to undertake risky enterprises was "This is England's only army." With difficulty, the Government had been able to spare him 30,000 men. But in this war the Generals knew that every able-bodied young man up to and including men who had reached the prime of life could be called up for national service. They grudged every man who was kept at home for essential national work. They were always nagging about it. They lavished the lives placed at their disposal in foolish frontal attacks on impregnable lines, in spite of the lessons of every war since modern weapons were perfected. They then sent home requisitions for more units to bring their depleted battalions up to strength, out of the inexhaustible resources of Britain in man-power. If these orders were not immediately complied with, there came querulous complaints and petulant suggestions that victory was impossible unless gaps were filled up. Most of these gaps in our manhood were rent by clumsy and unintelligent craftsmanship at the top. The wastage of all material was appalling. Whilst hundreds of thousands were being destroyed in the insane egotism of Passchendaele, every message or memorandum from Haig was full of these insistencies on the importance of sending him more men to replace those he had sent to die in the mud. If Britain said, "Where are my lost legions?" then anyone who asked such a question on her behalf was betraying the Army and attacking our soldiers. The word "soldiers" always had exclusive reference in the War Office Press to those whose tasks were discharged on the safe side of the front line; to those who never set foot on the stricken field until the poor "units" which had to be replaced had already made it safe for inspection. To prevent that misrepresentation which is always ready to misapprehend, let me repeat here what I am saying elsewhere—that from what I know of the brass-hatted soldiers, I have no doubt that had it been part of their duty to march at the head of their men, and share their perils, they would have done so without faltering. I am not seeking to establish any distinction or discrimination between the soldiers who fought and those who did not. My sole complaint is that those who arrogated to themselves the task of what they called "defending the soldiers against the politicians" always confined their defence to the latter class of soldier. I cannot recall a single article in which they sought to protect the former against the strategy which condemned them to a useless carnage in the execution of ill-conceived projects.

The effect on the morale of the Army was perceptible. Buchan's "History of the War," a book which throughout has taken a favourable view of our High Command, says about the effect of this particular battle that:—

"For almost the first time in the campaign there was a sense of discouragement abroad on our front. Men felt that they were being sacrificed blindly; that every fight was a soldier's fight, and that such sledge-hammer tactics were too crude to meet the problem. For a moment there was a real ebb of confidence in British leadership. That such a feeling should exist among journalists and politicians matters nothing, but it matters much if it is found among troops in the field."\*

Mr. Buchan wrote this whilst he was in uniform, but even for a Staff officer, this contempt for journalists and politicians is a little cheap and gratuitous. The morale of the public behind the lines is essential to victory in a protracted struggle. In sustaining its spirit through discouragement the despised pressman or politician has his uses. The politicians had moreover, the responsibility for organising the resources of the country. But although they matter, Mr. Buchan would be right in saying that the loss of morale amongst the fighting troops matters most.

According to this "History," the brunt of the criticism was directed against General Gough:—

"His old reputation had become a little dimmed, and among his soldiers he had acquired the name of a general who tried his troops too high, and used them blindly as battering rams against the stoutest part of the wall. The criticism was not wholly just, but it was widely made."†

How unfair that criticism was we know now, for he protested as far back as August against proceeding with the battle. His objections were overridden and he was peremptorily ordered by his Commander-in-Chief to continue the hopeless struggle.

Expression was given to the feeling amongst the rank and file in a remarkable book called "Four Years on the Western Front," by a Rifleman. He took part in the battle, and the division in which he was a humble unit was almost completely destroyed without achieving much. He says:—

"Something like a feeling of indignation came over us, that whole divisions should be squandered as though we had an unlimited reserve of men, and human life counted for nothing. One attack after another had produced disappointment, heavy losses, limited gains."‡

There can be no doubt that when the battle came to an end the fighting spirit of the troops that had passed through this prolonged

\* 'A History of the Great War,' by John Buchan, Vol. III, p. 592.

† *ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 189.

‡ "Four Years on the Western Front," p. 273.

horror was at its lowest. It was a calamity unforeseen by G.H.Q. that their frayed nerve was to be put to another test before they had been given time to recover. It was this army under the same General that was doomed to bear the brunt of Ludendorff's great coup on the Oise in March, 1918. No soldiers in that condition could have sustained such an onslaught. It is no reflection on their valour to say that they broke. So much for the claim of the apologists of Passchendaele that German morale alone had been impaired. As if British troops were not also flesh, blood and nerves!

Another of the incalculable consequences was that it completely slammed every other door of opportunity for the Allies—but alas! not for the Central Powers. There can be no doubt that Turkey could have been knocked out and forced to make peace, had the Allies sent a couple of the cavalry divisions (which proved to be worse than useless on the Somme, at Passchendaele and at Cambrai) and a few more heavy guns and ammunition to Palestine. As General Allenby proved, the resolute façade the Turks presented to the Allies on the lines of Gaza-Beersheba had nothing behind it. It was part of the War Office game to pretend that the Turks had formidable forces with ample reserves and that if they were attacked seriously the Germans would rush to their succour and beat us off. They may have believed it, but if so, either their information was defective, or they were easily taken in. In either event, it was a failure of intelligence. There was a paper prepared in December by the Military Council at Versailles and signed by Generals Weygand, Cadorna, and Henry Wilson, exposing the whole crumbling bogey of Turkish prowess which had so long frightened our timid military leadership in Egypt—but not in Mesopotamia. Here is the report:—

“There remains the Turkish theatre. To inflict such a crushing series of defeats upon the Turkish Armies as would lead to the final collapse of Turkey and her elimination from the War would not only have the most far-reaching results upon the general military situation, but might also, if not too long deferred, be in time to enable the Allies to get into direct touch with, and give effective help to, such elements of resistance to German domination as may still exist in Roumania and Southern Russia. Even a lesser measure of success such as would definitely liberate the Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire from the Turkish yoke and compel the Germans to divert considerable forces to the East in order to save Turkey from destruction, would, both from the point of view of the military situation and from that of eventual peace negotiations, greatly strengthen the Allied position, and be worth any effort that can be made compatibly with the security of our defence in the Western theatres.

*The present condition of Turkey is one of almost complete*



*material and moral exhaustion.* The Turkish forces have progressively dwindled, till they now amount to 250,000 men at the utmost, and will dwindle even more rapidly if seriously attacked, owing to the entire lack of reserves. Such as they are, these forces are dispersed, and are necessarily dispersed over enormous areas. The communications between the different fronts are so defective that any transfers of troops can only be carried out extremely slowly and with heavy wastage through sickness and desertion. The main railway communication with Constantinople and the Central Powers is itself of very limited capacity, and vulnerable to air attacks. Reinforcement of troops or munitions from Germany could only be accumulated very gradually, and the sending of them would involve a heavy strain on the enemy's transport resources."

Sir William Robertson expressed himself as being in complete agreement with the conclusions drawn from known facts by the Versailles Council. By the date of their report Allenby's advance had exposed the hollowness of the Turkish menace. For that reason the General Staff at the War Office could no longer sustain their convenient assumption of Turkish strength. The information upon which they were based had come mainly from the Intelligence Department of our own War Office, and must have been known to the Staff. But to communicate such information to the War Cabinet before the Allenby victories, meant that they might be tempted to deflect an extra division and a few guns from the attack on Passchendaele, and perhaps—most disastrous of all—send to Palestine some of the invaluable squadrons of cavalry that might at any moment be urgently needed to charge into the flying rout of the demoralised German Army in Flanders. The fact remains, that but for the distraction of Passchendaele, Turkey might have been forced to make peace, and the Black Sea might have been opened to Russia and Roumania. Bulgaria would not have held out much longer, for it was known that her peasants, who were never enamoured of the War, were getting thoroughly tired of squatting on their perch in the Balkans, whilst their fields and their harvests were being neglected.

The Flanders campaign was directly responsible for the Italian disaster. As I have already pointed out, General Pétain was agreeable, after the Chemin des Dames affair, to sending assistance in men and artillery to Italy to enable General Cadorna to undertake a real attack on the Austrian position. Had Haig taken the same view, we would have been saved the disasters of Caporetto and Passchendaele, both of which tipped the balance of man-power and prestige so heavily in favour of the Central Powers. The inadequate state of the defences of Gough's Army in front of Amiens in March, 1918, was entirely attributable to Passchendaele. The French Government and Army had been pressing hard for an extension of the British

Front ever since May. The Army Commission of the Senate had gone into the matter in great detail and had reported strongly in favour of bringing pressure to bear on the British Government to take up more line in France. It has been represented that Haig's persistence in the Flanders campaign was due to Pétain's entreaties. Pétain was opposed to it from beginning to end: but he was exceedingly anxious that we should occupy more front line. It would materially have assisted him in his very difficult task of reorganising and strengthening the French Army. There was an overwhelming case in favour of the request. France was very much more exhausted than we were. She had called up 15 per cent. of her population, whereas we had only recruited 10 per cent. of ours, and her casualties were heavier by at least a million, for she had borne the brunt of the fighting during the first two years of the War, whilst we were building up our Army. Sir William Robertson never denied that there was a good case, and he would have been quite willing to meet the French demand, but Haig said he needed every available man for the Flemish campaign. He succeeded in postponing the decision until the campaign was well over. When, at last, he agreed with Pétain as to the limits of the extension, it was February before the change could be effected. When Gough took over the line up to the Oise, he found the defences were very unsatisfactory, but his troops were tired out by their unparalleled experiences and were in no condition to start digging. This was known to the Germans. The advantage they took of it will be told in another chapter.

Passchendaele was indeed one of the greatest disasters of the War, and I never think of it without feeling grateful for the combination of seamanship and luck which enabled us to survive and repair its unutterable folly. There is no better illustration of its calamitous effect than the episode of Cambrai.

## CHAPTER LXIV

### THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

WHEN the Tank Corps officers perceived how completely their predictions as to the effect of a heavy bombardment on a drained morass had been realised, they came to the conclusion that as far as their machinery was concerned, it could render no effective help under such conditions. They were equally convinced that victory was unattainable by any other arm on such a battlefield. They therefore set about making a study of the whole of the British Front with a view to formulating a plan for attacking the enemy on a sector where tanks had a fair chance of showing what they could accomplish. The tanks had failed to achieve much on the Somme because in spite of the protest of all those who knew anything about that ingenious contrivance, Sir Douglas Haig insisted on throwing a few specimen machines into the fight without waiting until a sufficient number had been manufactured to enable him to hurl a resistless mass of them against the enemy lines. It was part of the Tanker dream to effect with a large number of machines a surprise attack for which the enemy were not prepared. The Tank leaders asked for a fair opportunity to demonstrate the value of their invention. They were given the swamps of Passchendaele. When General Gough appreciated that it was not ground over which even infantry could do more than crawl, it is not surprising that the Staff of the Tank Corps were convinced that their heavy cavalry could not make progress across such sodden ground. Early in August, therefore, their Chief General Staff Officer, Colonel (now General) Fuller, drew up an alternative project. In his preface to the plan he said: —

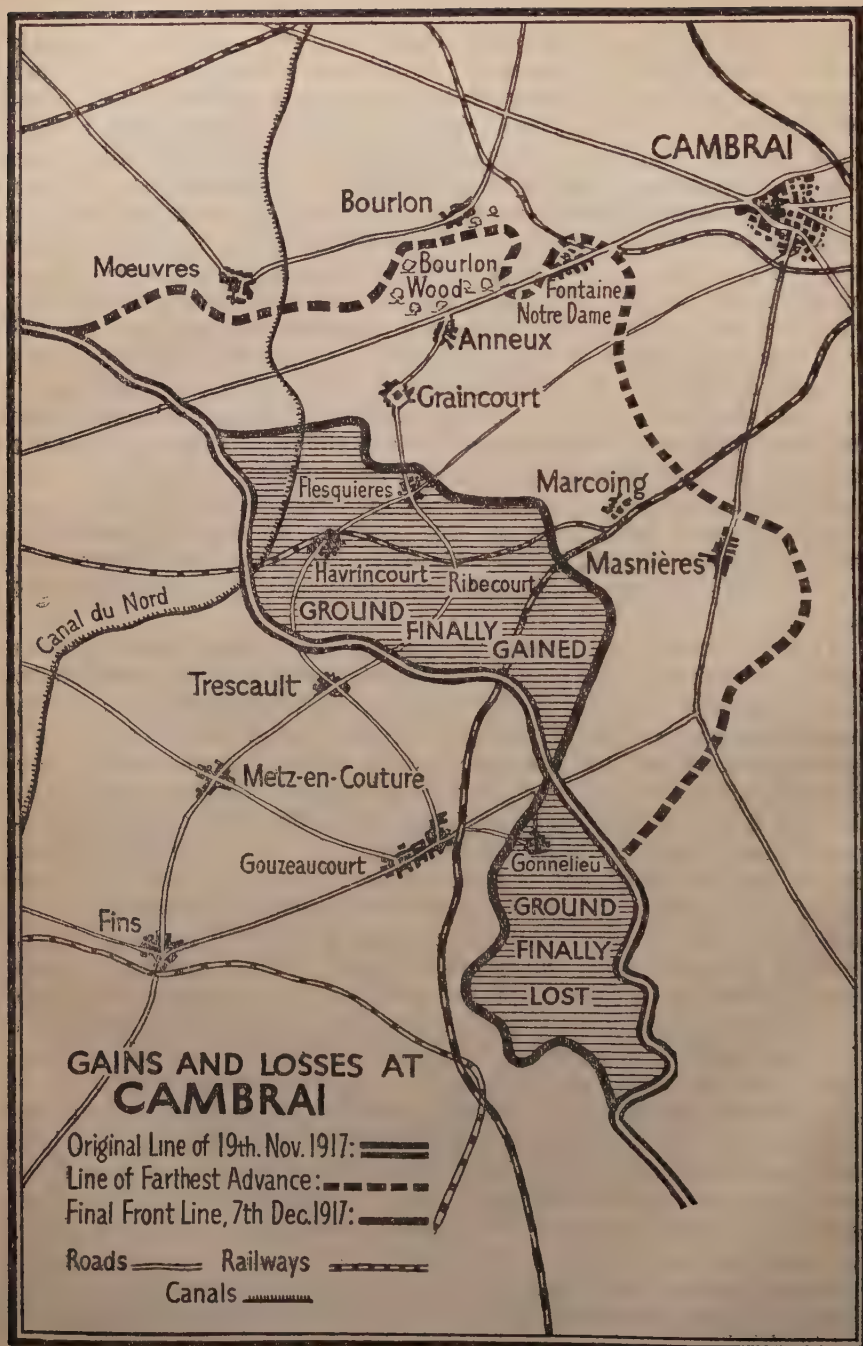
“From a tank point of view the Third Battle of Ypres may be considered dead. To go on using tanks in the present conditions will not only lead to good machines and better personnel being thrown away, but also to a loss of morale in the infantry and tank crews, through constant failure. From an infantry point of view, the Third Battle of Ypres may be considered comatose. It can only be continued at colossal loss and little gain.”

He proposed that “in order to restore British prestige,” what he called “a theatrical blow” should be struck at Germany before the



winter. He suggested that preparations should be made for an attack in the direction of St. Quentin. As this would involve a combined British and French operation, it was thought better that the operation should take place on the British Front, and Cambrai was substituted for St. Quentin. General Byng, to whom the idea was submitted, was favourably inclined, but G.H.Q. objected strongly on the ground that the Romans laid down the military doctrine that you could not win a decisive battle in two places at the same time, and that the Commander-in-Chief could not spare the necessary troops for the Tank project as he must concentrate every available man in the Ypres sector. But as the failure of the mud offensive at last oozed even into the minds of its projectors, they became more inclined to consider the idea of an independent Tank attack further south. But even then they could not be induced to let go their Passchendaele offensive altogether. They were stuck in the mud and could not get out of it without getting through it to the ridge. They had to improve their positions or run the risk of being driven out of all the fine swamp they had made and annexed at such cost. So when the Cambrai attack was undertaken, it had to be launched without any reserves. Not an extra battalion could be spared from the suction of the mire.

The first onset of the Tanks, on the 20th November, was a brilliant success. Within a few hours the Hindenburg line was broken by these inexorable machines, and a penetration effected in the enemy lines as deep as that which had been achieved after months of terrible fighting and colossal losses on the Somme and at Passchendaele. It is generally acknowledged now that the advance was badly muddled by General Byng and that he could, even with the resources at his command, have made a much better job of it. But what converted victory into a defeat was the total lack of reserves. When it was essential that there should be fresh troops available to support and exploit the attack, there was not a single platoon in reserve. They were all floundering in the Flemish slough. The Germans, having been allowed by a magnanimous enemy plenty of time to recover from their surprise, prepared a counter-attack, and fully a week later they launched their onslaught after deliberate and careful preparation. The German Army whose divisions, we were assured, had all been used up by the great offensive, was able to muster 14 divisions to overwhelm our scattered and tired troops. Five of these divisions had been transferred from the Flanders battle area, and nine from other portions of the Western Front. These they could spare in addition to the six divisions that had already gone to Italy and the five divisions that had captured Riga. How could they have raked up three separate striking forces of 25 effective divisions, in the aggregate, after a battle of 14 weeks' duration, which we were assured had shattered their Army in the West and destroyed their reserves?



When the counter-attack came, there was nothing behind to give any help to our outnumbered and exhausted divisions. The Germans not only recaptured most of the ground we had gained, but at one point penetrated to a distance of 1,500 yards behind our original line. All that was left to us of our conquest was the indefensible salient of Flesquières. A resounding victory was converted into a disastrous rout. For this, Passchendaele was directly responsible. Had our Army not entered upon that fatal campaign, the Battle of Cambrai in 1917 might have been one of the decisive battles of the War. It was the only complete surprise the British Army had contrived to inflict upon the Germans. Their strongest defences had been broken through. For the first time we had reached the open country behind their lines. Had there been adequate reserves to throw in, Cambrai would have been captured, the German defence system would have been dislocated, a new retirement would have been imposed on the enemy, and the time and strength he devoted to prepare his March offensive against our lines would have to be spent in reorganising his own defences. One-fourth of the men flung away so profligately at Passchendaele would have sufficed to win this signal victory, and to exploit it.

When the first news of our great triumph reached London, the War Office ordered that all the church bells of the metropolis should be set a-ringing. A few days after the chimes had ceased to thrill the hearts of Londoners, the counter-attack came, and our troops were driven back pell-mell—such of them as escaped capture. The Staff who were responsible for the joybells were ashamed to publish the news of the reverse. Even the War Cabinet was kept in the dark. Messages came from Headquarters, sent at a time when the enemy had actually penetrated inside our original defences, about the "hostile attacks" on this front having been completely repulsed; how ten of these attacks "had been broken up by our rifle or machine-gun fire or crushed by our artillery." But that skill in manipulating news to convey a false impression which had served Headquarters so well in the Flanders attack failed completely at Cambrai. One reason was that we actually lost ground. Some days after the defeat had occurred the real news percolated through. General Maxse, who was a member of the Court of Inquiry subsequently appointed, blamed the wounded for disseminating alarming news. According to him they were always doing it. It was a very reprehensible practice and deserved censure. News from the front should be confined to official dispatches written by men who never saw the fighting, and whose calm was therefore in no danger of being irritated or upset by wounds.

The Cabinet, several days after the disaster, recorded its dissatisfaction that the fact of so complete a reverse having been sustained "if this were correct," had not been reported to the War Cabinet,



and it was urged that if we had inflicted a corresponding reverse upon the enemy, the news of our success would have been communicated in a few hours.

We were also anxious to have an explanation why such a surprise should have been inflicted on our forces, if our aerial support was as complete as it had been alleged to be, and if our defensive arrangements were properly organised.

The only reply that could be offered by the Secretary of State for War was that the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief was probably himself "ignorant of the causes of this reverse." This was about a week after our defeat.

The confusion that existed was given as an explanation of the paucity of news, and the Chief of the Staff compared the chaos with what had happened during the retreat from Mons, when, although he himself was present, he was quite unable to obtain information. He did not inform Ministers that the attack had been ordered without any reserves, nor did Sir Douglas Haig in his reports deem it necessary to inform the Government of that important factor in our repulse. The Cabinet also called attention to the

"discrepancy between the nature of the German success and the reports which had been consistently received from official sources in regard to their weakness and the deterioration of their morale."

The Cabinet ordered that there should be a thorough inquiry into the circumstances which had been responsible for the reverse. The news of the disaster produced a disconcerting effect on public opinion, which had been stimulated to such a sense of exhilaration by gulping the heady wines which had fermented in the inexhaustible vats of the Intelligence Department at G.H.Q.

The *Times*, which had hitherto been amongst the most inebriated of all our journals with the Haigean triumphs was steadied by this shock and wrote a caustic article about the

"reversal of fortune on our own front, of which the truth is slowly leaking through the correspondents' tales of heroism."

It says that—

"we can no longer rest satisfied with the fatuous estimates, e.g., of German losses in men and morale, which have inspired too many of the published messages from France."

It exculpates Sir Douglas Haig from any blame for the disaster, except in so far as this was attributable to his choice of subordinates and his inveterate devotion to those who had served him too long. It does not allude to the vain efforts made by these subordinates to persuade him to give up the wasteful attack on the Passchendaele

Ridge, which was directly responsible for the Cambrai fiasco. Perhaps Lord Northcliffe had not been informed about these attempts. The *Times* continued:—

“The merest breath of criticism on any military operation is far too often dismissed as an ‘intrigue’ against the Commander-in-Chief.”

It demanded “prompt, searching and complete” inquiry.

This indeed represented a complete change from the ecstatic eulogies of Broodseinde, but it came too late to save us from the much greater catastrophe of Passchendaele. An inquiry was set up, but it turned out to be an utter sham. General Byng, who was responsible for the battle arrangements, was never called. But inadequate as was the investigation, it reveals something of the causes of the defeat. Without making any specific reference to the absence of reserves, of the insufficiency of the equipment for making and sustaining the attack, it suppresses facts, but gives glimpses which expose the blunders and shortcomings of the operation.

As to the three divisions that were overrun with practically no resistance, it was reported that they were “weak in numbers.” It was stated that:—

“they did not retreat or run away. They were surprised to such an extent that only two men got back out of the left battalion of the 55th Division, and less than 100 men got back from most of the battalions engaged in the three divisions.”

These battalions had gone into action at only half their strength. German aeroplanes:—

“flew at altitudes which have been described by witnesses as being lower than 100 feet, firing their machine-guns into our infantry both in the front trenches and in rearward positions. The moral effect of these was very great, and no doubt tended to facilitate the enemy’s success.”

Not only were there no British aeroplanes, but even the Court of Inquiry considered there was a “paucity of guns,” and that this:—

“facilitated the assembly of the enemy and the assault upon our front lines.”

Where were our aeroplanes? Probably hovering over the swamps of Passchendaele. Where were our guns? Digging fresh shell-holes in the same marsh to impede our own advance.

But the High Command who prepared the plans, knowing that they had not sufficient troops, guns and aeroplanes to carry them out, were exonerated from blame.

The main part of the blame was cast upon the officers and men who had fought so well and so successfully, who were not apprised of the great preparations made by the Germans for a counter-attack, and who, when that overwhelming attack materialised, were left to meet it without any supports.

There was one member of the Court of Inquiry who excelled himself on this occasion. General Maxse's wrath is directed, not at the great generals who were really responsible, but at the lower ranks who too readily believed the rumours of disaster. The public at home were misinformed: —

“not merely by the newspapers and Members of Parliament, but also through the medium of 400,000 officers and men who proceeded backwards and forwards on leave.”

He is specially angry with the wounded: —

“The most prolific propagators of baseless stories are the wounded. Moreover, they get home before the telegrams, and rapidly spread the foolish notion that if they had been in charge of the conduct of the operations, things would have been very different.”

One of his remedies for this calamity is that the senior local commander on the spot should tell his own story to the public as soon as possible after the event. And here is a specially rich quotation from his diatribe against the garrulity of the wounded: —

“Unless we adopt some such method of conveying the truth, the longer the War continues and men's minds are unsettled, the more will the public at home be at the mercy of false notions, which are detrimental to the efficiency of the Army as a whole, and to the morale of the nation.”

His anxiety for instituting some new method of “conveying the truth” has a peculiar irony, having regard to the glowing reports of victory issued from Headquarters about the fighting in Flanders. The same observation applies to his suggestion that: —

“Something might be done at G.H.Q. by appointing a soldier to help the newspaper correspondents to understand the telegrams which come in during the course of an important battle. These correspondents might perhaps then avoid filling the columns of their newspapers with a torrent of rubbish.”

In alluding to the public opinion that the Battle of Cambrai had ended in a “German success instead of a British victory,” he says: —



"I cannot help thinking that *we soldiers* with our extreme reticence and horror of all forms of publicity, may be somewhat to blame for this result."

Clearly, "we soldiers" does not include those who are wounded in the battle, neither does it comprise the 400,000 officers and men who had survived Passchendaele and Cambrai and gone home on a short leave. There is neither reticence nor truth to be found in them.

There is one part of his report however which has an historical and also a military value, but it conveys an indirect and probably unintentional condemnation of the Flanders campaign. In attributing the defeat at Cambrai to the ignorance displayed by officers and men of the elements of defensive tactics, he attributes their deficiencies in this respect to the fact that there was no opportunity afforded them of training. Its importance is enhanced by the fact that General Maxse was probably at the time the highest authority in the British Army on the subject of training soldiers. He gives an illustration from his knowledge:—

"The writer of this note is acquainted with one corps which during the past twelve months happened to have 30 divisions in it. Of these 30 divisions two were splendidly trained, a dozen were trying to train and the remainder had little, if any, definite system of training at all. They had, instead, a dozen excellent reasons for explaining why they remained untrained. The corps commander concerned had no opportunity to insist upon improved methods of training, because the divisions were not in his corps for a sufficient time for him to get to know them or report upon them. All he gathered from one year's experience was a rough idea that about half the divisions were untrained and the other half were semi-trained."

The reason was obvious. The exigencies of these repeated offensives did not give any commander the necessary opportunity for giving the requisite training to men under his command. Every division in its turn was thrown into the trenches. When it came back behind the lines it was exhausted, depleted, having probably lost its most experienced officers and N.C.O.'s. Out of the 64 British divisions in France, 57 were thrown into the Flanders fight. What chance was there for any commander to train his men?

The report was a complete justification of General Pétain's policy of limited offensives and preparations for the campaign of 1918. But what a condemnation of the strategy of the fatuous campaign of the Flanders coast!

## APPENDIX

SINCE the publication of the foregoing chapters, I have received a very considerable number of letters from officers and men who took part in the Passchendaele Campaign, who actually fought in and through the mud, and witnessed the protracted horror, and who corroborate my testimony as to the terrain and confirm my opinion as to the utter stupidity of prolonging the struggle under such impossible conditions. Every one of these correspondents endorses fully my gravest allegations. I reprint below some extracts from their letters, in order to refute certain criticisms which have appeared from other quarters.

I refrain from giving the names, but should the authenticity of the letters be doubted or challenged, I feel confident I can obtain the authority of any writer to submit his name and the original letter to any responsible person who can be trusted. I have not received a single letter from any one who took any part in the actual fighting at Passchendaele which contradicts any of my statements, or suggests that the picture which I have endeavoured to paint is an exaggerated one. On the other hand, it is significant that among the few letters of criticism written to the Press, and the speeches which criticised the chapter in question, there is not one which emanated from any soldier who took part in the struggle and suffering on that sodden terrain from August to November.

### *Letters from Officers:—*

“ . . . Your book about Passchendaele was if anything not even severe enough. The conditions were impossible—no Staff Officer was ever to be seen near the front line, the sheer hopelessness and slaughter shook the morale of every man who took part. The generals responsible for prolonging the fight should have been shot.”  
(From an ex-Captain.)

“ As one who served as a junior officer under the late Lord Haig in 1917, and who transferred to the Air Force in order to escape the mud, I offer my respectful thanks for your courageous exposure of the Passchendaele horror.”  
(From an ex-Officer.)

“ I write to thank you for the honest and candid way you have written your three volumes of Memoirs. . . . As one who took an

insignificant part in it, I thank you. I was in France as a subaltern in the R.F.A. when we had three rounds a gun in the country. You gave us shells. I don't care how you did it, but you got them out there. . . ."

(From a Subaltern, R.F.A.)

"I served in the front line in France for four years; for the last two years of the war I commanded a Regular Battalion, and for many weeks was actively engaged in the Passchendaele offensive.

I feel that I must write a few lines to endorse, as completely as my limited knowledge permits, all you write on that subject. The experience of a Battalion Commander may not count for much. Necessarily, one knew little of the general position, or how matters elsewhere affected the position in Flanders. Still, I think one *saw* as much as most people, even though one's view was limited to the front of one's own brigade, for I never saw an officer of higher rank, on the Ridge, at all, throughout that terrible autumn.

It is unfortunate, of course, that your work could not have been published in Lord Haig's lifetime, but when one thinks of the thousands and thousands of lives flung *recklessly* away, without a chance, in that mud, and of those fresh divisions coming up, spick and span, from rest billets, but coming up hopelessly, knowing what they had to face (the only time I have ever seen British soldiers anything but cheery and confident) one is glad that the truth should be made widespread at last. Consideration for no one's feelings should be allowed to muffle that tragedy for ever."

(From a Lieut.-Colonel.)

"May I congratulate you on your exposure of the Passchendaele affair, and on turning the searchlight of truth on to Haig's military reputation. I have been delighted to see confirmed the opinion I always held about him, that he was a man of rigid ideas, devoid of all imagination and therefore of all inspiration; and without inspiration no man can successfully command armies. . . ."

(From a Major.)

". . . I feel that I must thank you for the outspoken way in which you have dealt with G.H.Q. and the Staff generally in the Passchendaele battle.

From personal experience I can bear witness to the truth of what you say as to the futility of the strategy and the ineptitude of the Staff, and of course, the awful conditions."

(From a Major.)

"As an ex-artillery officer, one of the thousands of wretched fellows who took part in that most depressing engagement, I heartily endorse every single word you say about that most terrible section of the Great War through which you so nobly and victoriously led this grand old country of ours.



During the Passchendaele 'show' it was common talk in every officers' mess that the whole thing was being badly bungled, and that the Higher Command had no clear-cut idea of what was happening, and had never seen that sanguinary sector to which we had to go, and whence so many thousands of our gallant brothers never returned. Your frank—although belated—comments will earn the gratitude of us all: you have said what countless thousands of us are thinking!" (From a Captain, Royal Artillery.)

"I have read your speech on the Battle of Passchendaele Ridge with much interest, and I should like to say that I can endorse all you say. I commanded a battery in the 291st Brigade R.F.A. and I was in action on 'Admiral's Road' and then on the Steenbecke River at the end of August, through September and half of October, except when I was absent in hospital wounded for about a fortnight, in 1917.

I was awarded D.S.O. (immediate award) for my services in action. I received orders, on about 12th September, 1917, to advance my battery on to the banks of the Steenbecke River from 'Admiral's Road,' so as to be able to come into action against the enemy within 48 hours. I protested that this was impossible, the whole area being a swamp, the bombardment having destroyed the banks and locks of the Steenbecke River, and it was impossible to move a man or a horse across this swamp until the R.E. had constructed causeways. I was able to prove my words. I reconnoitred the front from the 'Bund' to 'Kitchener's Wood' on two occasions; the swamp was full of corpses and there was a dead man's head lying on the duck-board causeway between the 'Bund' where were the H.Q. of the company, and the outlying picket in front of the cemetery. It was quite obvious that G.H.Q. were wholly ignorant of the conditions prevailing at the front. Everywhere I went the junior officers, N.C.O.'s and men were very bitter and contemptuous of G.H.Q. and complained that they had never seen a staff-officer or even a senior officer at the front."

(From an Officer with a D.S.O.)

"... I have been following this controversy with very great interest.

I may even be regarded as one of the few most competent witnesses, for I actually participated in and survived the events. I plunged about in Passchendaele from September until well into January. I served on the Western Front with little interruption from 1914 to the Armistice, with Infantry. I was a professional soldier; and I was able to view events not only in the light of military history and of strategy and tactics in which I had been instructed, but to compare the Third Ypres and Passchendaele offensive with

earlier experiences in Flanders, on the Somme, at Arras and elsewhere. . . .

The point which impressed me; and which seems of extraordinary importance is as follows:—

The experience of the Battle of the Somme, especially of October and November, 1916, should have stood as a grim warning to the futility of attempting any forward movement over shell-pitted ground when the weather conditions were so adverse. Ginchy and Guillemont, Le Boeufs and Le Transloy were experiments which invited no kind of repetition. While the subsoil of Flanders was more evil than that of the chalk downs of the Somme, even heavier rain made operations before Ypres almost impossible and life almost unbearable.

In the interests of truth please make any use you like of this letter.”  
(From a Lieut.-Colonel, D.S.O., M.C.)

“ . . . These staff officers who write to the Press cannot realise how much we who were in the fighting line resented having to fight the futile senseless hopeless Battle of the Passchendaele Ridge. . . .

Every man, I saw in the Infantry outlying pickets and the companies finding them, complained that they had never seen a staff officer or an officer of my seniority within a mile of the front.

. . . You have my leave to make any use you like of this.”

(From a Major, D.S.O.)

This correspondent wrote later as follows:—

“ . . . I shall be pleased for Mr. Lloyd George to make any use he likes of the excerpts from my diary; but I should like him to know that I wrote the diary long before I had read any of Mr. Lloyd George's War Memoirs and I think this should be made clear by Mr. Lloyd George, if at any time he should publish or make use of my diary. Indeed, I have only read the fourth volume of Mr. Lloyd George's War Memoirs since writing to you on the 7th of January, 1935. I am reading it now.

The burden of my song is that G.H.Q. were utterly ignorant of prevailing conditions, and that Haig should have gone to the front himself to find out what these conditions were.

“The British Commander-in-Chief has been severely criticised for persisting in the attacks on the Passchendaele Ridge throughout August and September, when it had become obvious that the enemy's position was impregnable, the unfavourable conditions, the rain and the mud, creating an insuperable barrier to our advance. It has been argued by friends of Sir Douglas Haig that it behoved him to attack in order to draw pressure off our Allies, the French *moral* was at a low ebb owing to the appalling

casualties suffered by them in 1916 at Verdun as well as in their efforts under General Nivelle, to storm the Chemin des Dames in April, 1917. This argument might perhaps have been sound in the month of May when there was mutiny in the ranks of some of the French units; but it was certainly not sound when the French had regained their *moral* in the autumn, when they had sufficiently recovered to give the enemy a good beating at Malmaison. Indeed, I find it hard to believe that the French *moral* had ever fallen as low as has been alleged by apologists of Haig's strategy; if so, why did the Germans neglect to take any advantage of the French mutinies? Why did they not counter-attack the French in May, June or July, 1917, before the British offensive in Flanders had commenced? *General Buat, the chief of the Staff at G.Q.G., assured me that both Foch and Pétain were strongly opposed to our persisting in our attack in Flanders after the ground had become waterlogged.*

Moreover the British Navy's urgent plea that our troops should endeavour to force the enemy to evacuate Zeebrugge and his submarine bases on the Belgian coast became impossible of execution when the torrential rain—a veritable cloudburst at the end of July had changed all Flanders into a sea of mud. However that may be, the Battle of Passchendaele Ridge was continued throughout August, September and October in the most depressing and heart-rending conditions when it had become obvious to all ranks in the fighting line that the Battle was futile, senseless and hopeless of success. Our casualties mounted higher and higher into hundreds of thousands and we watched the *moral* of our men ebbing fast away and began to lose all faith in the skill of our commander-in-chief in the science and the art of war. Wherever I went in my reconnaissances, in "Sanctuary Wood," or along the front of the cemetery between "Boche Castle" and "The Bund," the infantry in the outlying pickets grumbled that they had never seen a staff-officer or any senior officer within a mile of the front lines and so *I was forced to the conclusion, from these complaints and from the nature of orders impossible of execution, which I received, that G.H.Q. were wholly ignorant of prevailing conditions; that they were being guided solely by maps drawn in peace-time before the ground, saturated with the heavy rains, had been battered and churned by hundreds of thousands of high explosive shells into a sea of liquid mud in which men, horses and mules must have drowned had they attempted to advance.*

So great was the patience and discipline of our regimental officers, N.C.O.'s and men that it was not until after the battle that the depth of their resentment at being sacrificed in this futile, useless slaughter was revealed to me. Nothing provoked our



ridicule more than the presence of cavalry massed behind our lines, revealing G.H.Q.'s childish belief that cavalry might be able to pursue the enemy, in the event of a break-through, across the sea of liquid mud where performing seals or porpoises might have been able to make better progress than horses!

Never, except in the Tropics, have I seen such rain. We ourselves, were in action in Gouzeaucourt Wood on the Somme on the night when the Ypres offensive opened. All our dug-outs were flooded flush with the surface of the ground; my kit was floating about in deep water, and I shuddered as I watched the rats scampering away through the undergrowth seeking safety in the open fields.

Reflecting on the far-reaching results of the Battle of Passchendaele Ridge, seventeen years after having taken part in it, I have come to the conclusion that it revealed the limitations of Sir Douglas Haig in the Art if not in the Science of War. *Its heavy casualties and unspeakable horrors reduced to a very low ebb the moral of the British troops which had patiently borne their losses on the Somme without a murmur, because the Somme did not seem to them so utterly useless and unnecessary as Passchendaele. My own belief is that this battle lowered not only the moral of our army, but that of our country for an age; much of the unhealthy "pacifism" of the youth of England to-day being due to the massacre of our soldiers in the swamps of Flanders in 1917, while their leaders, military and political, looked on.'*"

*Letters from N.C.O.'s and Men:—*

"... Bravo! As one of the survivors of the Passchendaele massacre I should like to add my testimony to the remarks in your recent publication. It is as a breath of fresh air, dispersing the fog and fog of hypocrisy and deception. Every front line man knows full well that what you have said is more than the truth, and that you have let off lightly those responsible for such criminal folly...."  
(From a Private.)

"Of course you are right and not a bit too severe.

Even before the rain, the area selected for the attack was certainly unfavourable from the tank point of view; but our very excellent G.O.C. was a keen soldier and not at all sure that tanks would get much further shrift from G.H.Q. unless used."

(From a M.C.)

"Having read the Press extract of your indictment of the Passchendaele stunt, I am taking the liberty of writing to you to endorse all you have said regarding the conditions, although, if

you will pardon my saying so, even you have no real conception of what we had to endure . . . But has it ever occurred to you what a unique position you are in of preventing a recurrence of that kind of thing for all time?" (From a Private, London Regt.)

"As an ex-soldier who saw considerable fighting on Passchendaele, may I offer you my sincere thanks for the way in which you have shown up the folly and horror of the whole thing." (From an ex-Soldier.)

"Many thanks for revealing who were responsible for the Passchendaele attacks. I came home on leave from this attack on the 20th October, 1917. My father asked me how things were going out there, which meant France. My answer to that was, whoever is responsible for the Passchendaele affair ought to be hung, drawn and quartered . . . At the British Legion Dinners, where battles are all fought over again, I usually buttonhole the Chairman or General who happens to be there and ask this question: Why were we always nibbling at the Germans to gain a few hundred yards? Always the same answer: To break their *moral*. Well, Passchendaele did more to break the *moral* of our men than anything the Germans ever did." (From a Gunner.)

"May I write to congratulate you on your History of the past War, and on your courage in exposing the Passchendaele slaughter. As an old Territorial who went to France in November, 1914, with the L.R.B. and finished at Passchendaele in 1917 I've been very interested." (From an Old Territorial.)

"Being an ex-Serviceman, who knows the tracks of Passchendaele and horrors of war, I feel I must write a few lines of appreciation to you for coming out in the open and showing the public what really did happen. Go ahead, Sir, I feel certain you will have the backing of the ex-Service *fighting* men." (From an Infantryman.)

"I take this opportunity of congratulating you on your fearless exposures of the horrors and blunders of the War. As a young Highland lad I soon had my eyes opened as to what a ghastly business war is where man is brought below the level of the beast. I served at Ypres, Passchendaele and the Somme where it was obvious to even the soldiers in the trenches that blunders were committed with unnecessary loss of life." (From an ex-Sergeant.)

". . . Thank you for your fearless disclosures of ineptitude and blockheadness at Passchendaele. You have earned the gratitude of thousands of ex-Service men." (From an ex-Private.)

“ . . . I had a son in the War and he endorses everything you say. It may interest you to know that my gardener was a sergeant-major at Passchendaele and he says that your remarks in your last volume about that battle, are completely in accord with all the soldiers who took part in it.”  
(From a Schoolmaster.)

“ I agree with every word you have written and said, although a professional soldier at the time. . . .”  
(From a Professional Soldier.)

“ Having read your Memoirs and comments on Passchendaele you have voiced the naked truth. As one having been through there, I wish to tender my congratulations to you.” (From an ex-Soldier.)

“ Being very interested in your Memoirs and also the controversy now raised about Passchendaele, I thought I would write to you and mention how splendid your account is of that action, and of the places which you describe. I have been at many of the latter.”  
(From an ex-Private, R.A.S.C.)

“ . . . I could support you in what you say—having had two years on the Western Front with the 1st Batt. King's Own Royal Lancasters.”  
(From an ex-Soldier.)

“ Re your exposure of fighting in Passchendaele area, I beg to enclose page 2 of a letter sent to mother and dad on 26th October, 1917, for your inspection.

It verifies your statements as to its horrible conditions—MUD AND WATER—HELL:—

“ . . . What really happened was this. After coming out of action, I began to feel the after effects and began to run down with dysentery and bad feet and legs, etc. On the battlefield it was mud and slush and shell holes filled with water everywhere. The fighting was intense and the dead and dying lay everywhere. Hundreds of the dead lay about everywhere, and had been there for weeks in some cases I should say. Our Battalion held the line under heavy bombardments one after the other. Often we sat in water, with feet and legs in, always. We even had to go so far as to find and take dead men's rations and water. Not only that, but we had often to drink shell-hole water, not knowing what would be at the bottom. Many a lot I helped to pull out of shell holes, where fellows were sinking and could not move. In some cases the wounded were a day or two before they could be moved. . . .” (From an ex-Soldier.)



"With reference to your narrative on Passchendaele, I remember vividly saying the following words, when collecting the dead of a previous division astride the Gravenstafel Road (Poelcapelle sector) on 27th September, 1917—"If Lloyd George could see this, he would stop the War to-morrow.'"

(From an ex-Soldier.)

"As an ex-Service man allow me to congratulate you on your outspokenness and trenchant criticism of the military commanders in the Great War . . . There are millions of ex-Service men like myself who went through the mud and carnage of Passchendaele, know to their sorrow the truth of these allegations and who will fully agree with you. God knows I am fully qualified to speak on these matters. I saw 4 years' service in France, went over the top no less than 39 times and had the good fortune or should say misfortune, to come through. I also fought with distinction, being awarded the M.M. . . . However, were the disclosures you made in this book to be hidden from the world, because it touches upon the conduct of those responsible or besmirches the name of a dead commander? What humbug. Does not the ruthless massacre of a million souls and the sufferings of the hundreds and thousands of broken men that survived this holocaust mean nothing?

I suppose you have noticed the type of man who defends Haig and justifies Passchendaele. Again, had Haig learnt nothing from the ghastly failures of Neuve Chapelle, Loos and the Somme? I took part in all these engagements and every one a hideous blunder and satisfied only the vanity of an incompetent Staff . . . Let me assure you that your comments are more than justified, indeed you have treated them very mild and considerate when one considers the magnitude of this muddle."

(From an ex-Serviceman, M.M.)

". . . At present the raging question seems to be your exposure of the Passchendaele tragedy and as one who took part in this campaign and experienced the vileness of the oozing mire, and with others knew that we were waging not only a useless but a hopeless attack, I say, Sir, that despite the alleged statements by certain branches of the British Legion, you are justified a thousand times in your assertions and I believe it is your public duty to continue to expose the obvious failings of those who so lamentably let you—as the Prime Minister—down and indeed the Empire. You have only given utterance to what the bulk of the troops had been saying quietly for years, that the 'Brass Hats'—with few exceptions—seldom trod the land for which they had made such elaborate theoretical plans. . . ."

(From an ex-Soldier.)

"After reading your fourth volume of 'War Memoirs' I thought it my duty to write and congratulate you. Those of us who took

part in the Passchendaele offensive know how true all you have written about it is. If anything, your account is less than the truth, because in the words of that great war correspondent, Sir Philip Gibbs, 'I say now that nothing that has been written is more than the pale image of the abomination of those battlefields, and that no pen or brush has yet achieved the picture of that Armageddon in which so many of our men perished.' You were perfectly right in exposing such bad generalship. Your book has had a good circulation in this north country and we will look forward to your next volume."

(From a Canadian ex-Soldier.)

"On looking through the daily papers . . . I was surprised to see the report of a speech by General Maurice complaining of your statements in your Memoirs re General Haig and his senseless military operations in Flanders during May to November, 1917.

Now, Sir, as a humble gunner of the 11th Siege Battery, I was in the Salient the whole of that time, and by personal experience I agree with every word that you have written relating to that affair, and I believe that General Haig knew of his ghastly mistake but he had not the courage to admit failure, and face an angry people in England and Wales.

My eldest brother who was in the Oxford and Bucks Regiment was a victim of the mud, and shell holes full of water. We met at Ypres two hours before he met his end, and often he expressed the opinion that men were being sent to certain death, with no object in view.

Pardon me writing to you, but I do feel annoyed with the President of the British Legion in calling your remarks a lie. My respects to you, Sir, for daring to tell the truth."

(From a Gunner.)

". . . Nothing you can say can truly depict the horrible and bloody mess of thousands of men lying in heaps round Passchendaele—and lay there for months and months. Truly a horrible blunder that was repeated again and again.

I was through that particular rotten offensive and came through alive and unwounded. Merely luck of course. . . .

I am not going into detail. The horror of Passchendaele lives with me today. It's not possible for me to forget. Nothing that might come hereafter could possibly be worse.

But I am sending you a field map of the ground we were supposed to capture. Our objective was Berks Houses. But of course the objective was never reached. We never got further than the cemetery. Berks Houses we never saw, and the reason was they were placed wrongly on the map. If it's at all possible you can compare this map with a correct survey map and you will see

the difference. This was of course only one of the many things that deceived the troops and cost thousands of lives."

(From a Corporal in the Gloucesters.)

"... I have read most of the books on the War, and I have searched and searched for some reasonable excuse for the ghastly Battle of Passchendaele.

I was appalled at the conditions. I knew what to expect and had no misgivings on the subject, but what I saw showed me the impossibility of any attack succeeding against an opponent holding the high ground and as the days went on I became more and more convinced of this . . . I could go on with describing the terrible conditions, but this is not my object, I wish simply to place on record my own impression from an ordinary soldier's point of view and satisfy a feeling I have had of the utter stupidity and hopelessness of the Passchendaele battle at which I was present from October to December."

(From one who served with the R.E. and the K.O.Y.L.I.)

"... I see some protest in the paper over your exposure of those appalling massacres. I could tell you worse. If you would excuse me, as I was in the Messines, Ploegstreet, Givenchy, 3rd Battle of Ypres, Lens, Hebuterne and Villers-Bretonneux battles. We won the War in spite of the sacrifices."

(In the Line for over three years—gassed four times and injured.)

"... The article about Passchendaele marked in the enclosed copy of the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* of 1st November may be of interest to you.

I am the ex-Serviceman interviewed, and the article is based on observations made at the time as the driver of an ammunition lorry which penetrated . . . throughout the whole of the area, and most certainly where no staff car was ever even seen. We also took up stones for road repair, and that up to where the trenches crossed the roads—or rather stopped on each side.

I have yet to notice, in the pack that is baying at you, any member of our citizen army, whose decoration was mud, and as we working soldiers certainly did not leave our brains and powers of observation at home, and were incidentally, as of the nation itself, the employers of the regular army, our opinion on the matter, is I venture to say, the judicial one.

We had not got the cavalry complex either, and did not have the feeling that losses did not matter as long as pukka methods becoming a Sahib were employed.

In the eyes of the professional soldier, the citizen army, and I venture to suggest, yourself and your Cabinet colleagues, not



having been to Sandhurst, were of a lower order of being, not to be taken seriously in the important matter of conducting a war according to the conventions that were thoroughly understood by those within the caste."

(From a Lance-Corporal, 90th and 119th Siege Batteries  
Ammunition Column.)

Extract from *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, Thursday, 1st November, 1934:—

"The attack was on 31st July, 1917, and the whole of the British Army knew about it during the whole of the month of July; all the roads north of Armentières were thick with troops moving up, without any attempt at concealment. What could the Germans think when day after day they saw the roads in one particular sector black with troops? I remember saying, three weeks before the attack, 'Look at Duggie advertising in the Berlin papers,' as our troops marched up.

Our then front was ten or twelve miles long round the Ypres salient, and north of Ypres it was roughly the Yser Canal. The extreme left of the canal was the famous 'flooded region' of 1914, reclaimed land that the Belgians had flooded by opening the dykes.

We started with the usual bombardment, which very thoroughly churned up the land over which we were going to attack. We didn't advance except for a limited distance at the beginning, and that meant that our barrage fell on the same portion for weeks after the attack started. The net result was to churn the ground into the consistency of Swiss milk; too thick to swim in and not thick enough to stand on.

I do say in all seriousness that after the first fortnight we couldn't have advanced if there had been no Germans there, until a causeway had been made across the mud.

And then it rained. It started on the day of the attack and it never gave up. We were sacrificing lives to no purpose whatever; you can understand a man being shot for the sake of his country, but there is no sense in a man being smothered for the sake of his country.

And yet advances were made, which speaks well for the rank and file, if it doesn't for the men behind who were telling them to do it.

I doubt whether a man without rifle or equipment could have moved more than a mile in twenty-four hours; the usual system was to put down a duckboard, walk along it, and put down another, and if a man slipped off his duckboard he was done for unless someone pulled him out immediately. There was one place where a caterpillar tractor, built for such conditions, slipped off the corduroy

road, and it took only four days to disappear in the bog. At another place I remember having an argument as to whether there had been a canal or dry land there before the bombardment began.

All the time Haig was at Montreuil-sur-Mer, saying 'Attack again.' The common report at that time was that Haig had never been up to see conditions for himself, and Lloyd George makes that definite statement in his book. It was absolutely obvious to the whole of the troops after the first fortnight that we could not possibly go forward.

Fighting in those conditions immobilised us, and made us a target for the enemy. For three months the roads coming away from the actual fighting line were filled with walking men; the walking wounded. Each one of those roads was exactly like Bradford Road or Leeds Road at the end of a Fartown or Town football match. That went on night and day, and there was a constant stream of ambulances as well.

Passchendaele petered out as an attack about the end of November, and in March, 1918, we simply walked out, evacuating all that we had gained, and coming back to our original lines. The conditions were so bad that it took the Germans a week to come back over the ground with nobody to stop them. Even if there had been no rain the attack would not have succeeded, because it had been too well advertised.

Passchendaele was an absolute crime, and if we have another war the same thing will happen again.

A Commander-in-Chief in the field has got more authority than any dictator who ever lived, for no dictator has anything so strong as military discipline to support him. The staff-officer who sends in a report that the Commander doesn't like is damning his chances of promotion, and if the Commander tells him to shut up he has to.

Such a thing as criticism is impossible. I once passed a casual critical remark about Haig, and an officer who overheard me said 'That's mutiny. I suppose you know you could be shot for that?'

That is one of the worst defects of the military system, and if there is another war hundreds of thousands of young men who are living to-day will be exposed to a second Passchendaele. The Regular Army was always a close corporation during the last War, and the whole of the new Army were considered outsiders by it.

As Lloyd George's Memoirs show, the Cabinet had very little idea of what was going on in the front line, and I think it ought to be made possible for every soldier to send uncensored letters to his own Member of Parliament. If this was thought too dangerous, an arrangement could be made for letters to be passed on to the individual Members after censorship by a small Parliamentary Committee, or the letters could be sent through the Speaker.

In any case, there should be something to protect the Army from

being wasted as it was wasted in the last War, without Parliament knowing what was going on."

Extracts from Press Correspondence:—

"... Those of us who went through the Somme and Passchendaele fiascos have an unflattering opinion of the mental equipment and military ability of the Staff who planned those ghastly operations. Some of the survivors of those infernos have learned to revise their opinion of the erstwhile despised 'frocks' and to think that perhaps Messrs. Lloyd George and Churchill had more strategical genius than was displayed by Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig, who wasted the flower of our Armies in doomed frontal attacks on heavily fortified positions held by a brave and well-equipped enemy.

The Somme, Passchendaele, and the blunders in the initial use of the tanks, will, in my opinion, effectively prevent Sir D. Haig from being acclaimed by posterity as a great Army Commander.

We who went through the hell of Passchendaele knew that somebody on top had blundered." (From an "Old Contemptible.")

The following letters were sent to me by ex-Soldiers who had sent them to the Press:—

"As one of the unfortunates who took part in the futile Passchendaele offensive, I was naturally interested in General Solly-Flood's remarks.

In a whole column of your paper he brings forward little or no evidence to refute Mr. Lloyd George's statements in his Memoirs, with which I am sure everyone who took an active part in this miserable episode will agree.

What were the important successes gained in the initial stages? The whole of the ground captured in the five months' battle was afterwards regained in one day by the Germans. The argument that we should attack the Germans in order to deter them from attacking the French is reasonable enough, but what competent person would have chosen such a swamp for this purpose, and surely only the most blindly ignorant and stubborn would have persevered in this wretched attempt after the first attack or so had proved the impossibility of even breaking through or achieving anything worth a fraction of the tremendous cost in lives and money.

Cambrai afterwards proved that any such necessary offensive could have been made on that front with every prospect of success, but by the time the attack on Cambrai was made, our reserves of men had been squandered at Ypres, and although at Cambrai more ground was gained in the first day than in the whole of the battle



of Ypres, there were no men left to follow it up, with the result that the Germans recovered most of the ground they lost.

What better example could one have of the 'brass hat' mind than the pathetic preparations for cavalry to be used in the 'duck's march' of Ypres?

Mr. Lloyd George has performed a signal public service in exposing for all time the true facts of this catastrophe, including his statement that the Cabinet themselves were deceived by such trickery as the removal of able-looking German prisoners when an inspection of those captured was asked for. There seems little of honour or glory in this." (From an ex-Officer.)

"Critics of Mr. Lloyd George stray from the point. His point is, why select for a battle a situation which was topographically and geologically the worst on the whole front? Some tactless persons asked the same question when preparations were begun long before the battle. There is perhaps some simple answer, which I am hoping the present discussion will bring forth.

The terrain of a battlefield is just as important to-day as it was at Agincourt. The geological formation at Pilkem was black clay, 2,000 ft. thick, impervious to water. Further south there were some local quicksands. Every drop of water which fell on the clay stayed there till it evaporated or drained into some hole. My general asked me to dig wells to supply troops with drinking water, as close behind the advance as possible. There was always great difficulty over water which had to be carried up in petrol cans. The general thought that because there was so much water about at Pilkem, it would be easy to get it from wells. But such wells would merely collect the surface water. Every shell hole was such a well ready made. I left shortly after, and do not know if wells were ever dug." (From a Lieut.-Colonel, late R.E.)

Extract from *The Yorkshire Post*, Tuesday, 27th November, 1934:—

"I should not venture to allude to the remarks of General Sir Walter Braithwaite at the annual dinner of the 62nd Division in Leeds last Friday were it not for the fact that his remarks about those chapters in Mr. Lloyd George's War Memoirs, which deal with Passchendaele, are likely to mislead your readers. An indictment framed against the nation's Commander-in-Chief by the Prime Minister under whom that Field Marshal carried on his duties is a very serious matter. It is a grave responsibility that Mr. Lloyd George has undertaken. If history shows that his case against Lord Haig is either unfair or, for the main part, untrue, Mr. Lloyd George's reputation in generations to come will suffer. He had little to gain and much to lose by saying what he did.

Those who have read the Passchendaele chapters will know that there are three principal parts in the indictment of Lord Haig. One is technical, the others moral. They are as follow:—

(a) That no soldier of repute should have allowed an immense British attack to take place across the Passchendaele terrain, which was reclaimed marshland, intersected with innumerable dykes, drains, and culverts, all of which must have been smashed to pieces by the artillery fire of both attackers and defenders, and were in fact so smashed. It is stated in the Memoirs that the ground at once returned to its natural marshy character, and that tens of thousands of wounded and unwounded British soldiers were drowned in it, and that only a trifling and useless advance was made at this terrible sacrifice of dead and wounded. It is further stated by Mr. Lloyd George that Haig could perfectly well have ascertained that constant heavy rain was to be expected in that part of Flanders from August onwards and that the excuse of G.H.Q. that the British advance was stopped by rain was no defence, since the rainfall that year in Belgium was below rather than above the normal.

(b) That Haig concealed from the British War Cabinet the fact that the leading French Generals, notably Foch and Pétain, were dead against a British advance in Flanders.

(c) That, whereas Haig, when he obtained the reluctant consent of the War Cabinet to the Passchendaele offensive, promised specifically to withdraw from it if the cost in casualties was excessive in comparison with the results gained; in fact he broke this promise. In evidence Mr. Lloyd George quotes General Gough, the Commander of the 5th Army, which was carrying out the Passchendaele attack. General Gough, it is stated, implored Haig to stop it. This, Mr. Lloyd George asserts, was never made known to the War Cabinet. He also says that they were kept in ignorance of the fact that General Plumer, the 2nd Army Commander, was also against it.

I served with and under Haig both in the South African War and in the Great War and I am not going to assume hastily that in the main Mr. Lloyd George is right and Haig wrong. Both sides must be heard by the Nation. I was not at Passchendaele, but was next door to it at Nieuport in August and September, 1917. We had orders to carry out a sudden and especially secret advance across the Yser Canal simultaneously with Passchendaele. Our attack never took place owing to the lack of success of the latter. One heard at the time quite enough to know that things at Passchendaele were not going as G.H.Q. hoped they would.

Many Generals have come to the defence of Lord Haig. Besides General Braithwaite, under whom I served in Gallipoli, there is my old Divisional Commander (42nd Division), General Solly-Flood.

What do these Generals say? General Braithwaite used two arguments. First, he said that a great English gentleman, a curious description of Earl Haig of Bemersyde, would not behave in the way Mr. Lloyd George spoke of his doing. I am afraid that, in the words of William Watson, 'History laughs and weeps down' that kind of facile argument. Secondly, General Braithwaite refers to the eulogistic speech of Mr. Lloyd George in the House of Commons when, after the War, he proposed a national gift of £100,000 to Lord Haig, which was duly voted. There is, however, nothing in this argument. The Prime Minister of Britain, speaking for the Empire and in a sense for all the Allies, could do no other. Lord Haig had rendered the country great services. The winding up of the War had been quickly and successfully carried out. How could any Prime Minister on such an occasion say, 'But do not let us forget his failure at Passchendaele'?

General Solly-Flood, like every other defender of Haig whom I have read, ignores the technical part of the indictment. He indulges, as do many such writers, in somewhat petty abuse of Mr. Lloyd George and implies that the French agreed to the selected points of attack, Passchendaele. As against this, Mr. Lloyd George quotes the late General Sir Henry Wilson as saying that Foch and Pétain were dead against the 'duck-walk in Flanders.' General Solly-Flood suggests that bad weather and mud unkindly intervened. But what did anyone expect in Flanders in autumn?

The General, with many other defenders of Haig, makes the point that the French implored us to attack in order to reduce the pressure on their armies, which were weakened by mutinies. Yes, but why at Passchendaele? Why not, as took place that November (but with inadequate forces, owing to the Passchendaele debacle) at Cambrai? I was in the Cambrai offensive and well remember how nearly it was our great break-through.

May I end this over-long letter by asking two questions?

(1) Was Mr. Lloyd George right, as against Robertson and Haig, in advocating attacks on the enemy where he was weakest instead of where he was strongest? This was the strategy of Germany as by such means she promptly knocked out of the war in succession Belgium, Serbia, Roumania, Russia and very nearly Italy as well, at Caporetto (immediately after Passchendaele).

(2) Did Marshal Pétain approve of the choice of Passchendaele as a terrain for an offensive? He is alive and could tell us.

E. N. MOZLEY."

"\*\* As it happens General Gough had in *The Times*, yesterday, a letter defining his attitude on the point raised by Colonel Mozley. General Gough writes:—'I was not opposed to the



plan of these operations, which, in my opinion, then and now, offered as good prospects of striking a great blow at the enemy and advancing the Allied, and especially the British, interests as any plan suggested in 1916-17. Mr. Lloyd George in quoting my opinion on these operations has torn from its context one sentence in my book (page 205), and he ignores several other pages which by no means support his contention that the battle was a useless butchery for which he was not responsible. Passchendaele was only a step in the long struggle, but it was a definite step towards victory. In throwing mud at the Commander-in-Chief, Mr. Lloyd George lowers the prestige and position of the British Empire in the eyes of the whole world. It is ironical to me to find myself quoted by Mr. Lloyd George in support of his statements about Passchendaele and that he was deceived by the Army chiefs. He walked past the window of my headquarters during the battle and did not visit me, though he could have got from me all the information he required.”

Extract from the *Guardian*, November, 1934:—

“The long letter in last week’s *Guardian* from General Solly-Flood, earns my deepest admiration. As an example of one ‘brass hat’ defending another it is a masterpiece that only a mind imbued with the military doctrine of the professional soldier could possibly conceive. To the man in the street who knew nothing of Passchendaele, it is a glorification of those who blundered there and did not have to pay for the mistakes they made and re-made in that tragic hell. To the man who suffered in the death-ridden cauldron of those swamps it is an insult added to an injury.

I offer no condemnation to the High Command for trying their skill—or lack of it—on the slopes of Pilkem Ridge or the wooded slopes of the Houthulst Forest. It was a gamble, with the coast and the Belgian ports as the prize and the lives of the thousands and thousands of our manhood’s flower from homeland and Empire as the stakes. The gamble, not because that flower was incapable or unwilling, but because the odds were too great, and the cunning of the gamblers was unequal to that of the opponents they gambled against. It was a tragic—nay, sinful—blunder to continue to waste the lives of men only too willing to offer them, knowing the gamble was hopeless.

General Solly-Flood says it was necessary to pin down the Germans, or the disasters of 1917 and 1918 would have been intensified. To that I would reply that the men and material consumed in the only too evident reckless folly of Passchendaele would, with the blockade and munitions provided by the man he scorns for speaking the truth have made the German onslaught

impossible. The tanks, etc., thrown away in the swamps of the ridges, would on the firmer grounds of Givenchy and the Somme in the spring of 1918, have given the Germans what they did later in that year, and shortened the war by six months.

The High Command in the security of St. Omer, knew nothing of the conditions of the battles at Passchendaele except what came down in reports from the few officers near it. The Tank Command knew and protested, only to be castigated for its trouble, while the High Command issued its orders blindly and kept away from the consequences of those orders.

No soldier who had to attempt to oust 'Fritz' from the 'pill-boxes' of Langemarcke or Poelcapelle ever had a staff-officer alongside him to help him to do it. As a Warrington soldier, in a Warrington battalion, who was there, the plain and outspoken words of Mr. Lloyd George are only what he has known since the horrors of that wicked sacrifice. They are true—only too true. Ask the men who were there whether they are understated or exaggerated. Anyone who says differently from Mr. Lloyd George is only exposing the fact that that person never saw Passchendaele. I was wounded there and lost many of my boyhood's pals there, too. Was Earl Haig or any of the Higher Command ever even under shell fire there?

Mr. Lloyd George's information is not guesswork or hearsay, I remember stumbling across the Canal Bridge at Pilkem into a weary, mud-stained officer, who directed me through the slush to the Ypres—Elverdinghe road. He had a Cambrian-Oxford accent and the tireddest-looking eyes I have ever known. His name was Gwyllam Lloyd George and he served in the battery of howitzers just behind the canal bank, or I have been mistaken for 17 years.

To General Solly-Flood, Earl Haig may have been everything he says he was. To 'Never again civilian soldier' Thomas Atkins, he was a 'Bunty pulls the strings' whom we never saw nor wanted to see. The C.I.C. may have shared all the amenities or otherwise of the same place as General Solly-Flood. Neither of them shared our sufferings or our conditions, unless we 'other ranks' overlooked them in the welter of mud and blood of the battle.

If the leaders of an army had to lead the attacks of the Passchendaele type—or only the professional soldier fight them—there would be empty armies and no more wars. To General Solly-Flood I say 'Defend your superiors if you feel you must'—to the fathers, mothers, and relatives of my dead and maimed comrades, I say 'Fight the type of mind and doctrine of those who threw away the lives of your loved ones in the Calvary of Passchendaele.'

King and country, yes— Militarism and murder, never."

(From "One of 'Old Chows' Company.")

Extract from *The Evening Times*, Wednesday, 14th November, 1934:—

“So many hard things are being said about the criticisms of military and naval leaders in the War Memoirs of Mr. Lloyd George that I am constrained, by a sense of fairness, to say something in their defence.

For instance, a letter in your columns the other evening, signed ‘Scottish Lassie,’ told a moving tale of Earl Haig’s frequent outbursts of tears because of the losses and sufferings of his men.

I would hate to spoil an illusion which ‘Scottish Lassie’ cherishes in her bosom, but I am afraid her picture of the weeping Haig is a piece of imaginative work by her Australian captain.

Haig wisna the greetin’ kind—real Scotsmen never are—although his care and concern for his men were deeper than mere tears. ‘Scottish Lassie’ is like all the critics of Lloyd George who have not read his books; she mistakes his ‘War Memoirs’ for personal attacks on individuals, dead or alive.

The ‘War Memoirs’ are the events of the War as Mr. Lloyd George saw and understood them—clearly his opportunity of understanding them was unique—and the criticisms of individuals are only incidental.

The true historian never shirks from criticism, even of his own personal friends, and Mr. Lloyd George never lays a charge without abundant quotations from official documents to prove his case.

I ask ‘Scottish Lassie’ and other critics of Lloyd George to read this view of the Passchendaele Offensive from one who played a very humble part in that bloodiest of battles. The unit I was in was the First Brigade of the Tank Corps.

The inventors of the tanks—the greatest invention of the War—designed this weapon to save the lives of the infantry by leading the attacks on entrenched and fortified positions, by breaking down the enemy’s wire and by suppressing the German machine-gun and rifle fire. This latter function was fulfilled by the concentrated fire of six-pounder and machine-guns.

The essential feature of the tank attack, however, was to be surprise! No preliminary artillery bombardment was required or wanted. Artillery bombardments only advertised the imminence of an attack.

Despite this, the tanks were never used in the intended manner until the battle of Cambrai on November 20th, 1917, fourteen months after their first introduction to the battle-front. Then their success was so startling and overwhelming that British and German General Staffs alike were completely surprised. This great victory was completely abortive, because our General Staff had not organised for a continuance of the ‘push’ after the ‘break-through,’



and had no reserves available. The result was, as Ludendorff succinctly put it, 'a brilliant tactical success which was not exploited.'

On the Passchendaele front the Tank Corps was first utilised on July 31st, 1917, after three weeks of the most intense bombardment ever known in warfare. The condition of the ground after this continuous night and day bombardment by guns of all calibres, from 18-pounders to 15-inch naval guns, baffles description.

Drainage systems ceased to exist, the whole countryside became a treeless, houseless morass, with big and little shell holes, filled with water, dotting the landscape (large numbers of our casualties were drowned!), and only the German *points d'appui*, their mebus or pill-boxes, filled with machine-gunners, raised above the sea of mud.

Over ground of this description the tanks were asked to trundle their 40-ton carcasses and assist the bravest, finest, and most intelligent infantry ever seen, to overcome an enemy organised by 'defence in depth' and sustained by the knowledge of three years' successful defiance.

Our soldiers performed miracles of valour, they achieved prodigies of endurance, and they suffered losses such as were never known before in military history.

Napier spoke with bated breath of regiments 'decimated' in Peninsular attacks, Lee and Jackson inflicted appalling losses on the Federal troops in the American Civil War, but the losses in the Great War were often almost complete. Battalions which went into action 1,100 strong not infrequently came out with 80 effectives.

The Tank Corps attempted the impossible. Tanks became ditched with irritating frequency, in which position they formed admirable targets for the German artillery; they held up attacks through time lost in unditching, and they failed to give the infantry the expected support, not through lack of skill or determination, but because the ground (?) was fitter for submarines than tanks.

The slopes of the Pilkem Ridge, the banks of the Steenbeke, St. Julien, Poelcapelle, and Westroosbeke were decorated with derelict tanks knocked out in the frequent attacks of the Third Battle of Ypres.

Only once in that dreadful three months' battle were the tanks allowed to attack in the proper manner. On August 20th, 1917, (I am writing from memory, but the date is, I think, correct), 12 tanks from our battalion went over in a small local attack, without preliminary bombardment and with permission to use the roads. Accompanying us was a brigade of the 48th Division, the objective being to straighten out a salient created in the July 31st attack.

Now mark the results. Every objective was taken in exact accordance with the time-table, the line was straightened, several

hundred prisoners and some machine-guns were captured, and the only casualties, incredible to relate, were 12 men wounded in the 48th Division, three men killed and 13 wounded in the tanks. Enthusiasm knew no bounds.

The staff and the infantry personnel, previously sceptical and derisive, could not praise us sufficiently, and then—the folly of it hardly bears credence—decided to do exactly the same thing again—i.e., send 12 tanks up the roads to take Poelcapelle. The least imagination might have told them that a variance of tactics was necessary, that the Boche would not be caught in the same snare again.

Our attack had been on Sunday. On the following Thursday 12 tanks of 'D' Battalion went up the road to Poelcapelle. The Germans had the roads 'taped,' the leading tank was hit and went on fire, the following tanks were ditched in endeavouring to pass, and the whole attack was a complete failure.

Then, most unfairly, the tanks were blamed for the failure, whereas the cause was lack of imagination higher up. A corps commander was reputed to have designated the tanks, in lurid language, as a nuisance which he would not tolerate on his front, and we poor devils of the Tank Corps were outcasts.

Later on, of course, the Tank Corps was brilliantly vindicated, one of their actions—at Villers-Bretonneux, on 8th August, 1918—being probably the finest of the War. But that is another story.

The point is that the attack on the Ypres front was an immensely costly and futile effort, splendidly organised and efficiently executed, but lacking in imagination and vision. Each fresh attack was abundantly advertised by tremendous bombardments, and the element of surprise was, therefore (except in the one instance I have given) completely absent, and ample time and warning were given to the enemy to organise his resistance.

For this the British Commander-in-Chief and his Staff must be held responsible. If the battle had been successful, as it might have been if wretched weather conditions had not supervened immediately after the initial attack was made on 31st July, Haig and his generals would have been covered with glory, but the stubborn persistence in the offensive after all reasonable prospects of success had vanished is, as I understand it, Lloyd George's chief criticism of the G.O.C., and history will, I think, support this view.

No one who served under Douglas Haig could doubt his ability, his patriotism, and his care and regard for his men. His faults were the faults of his military caste, burdened with preconceived ideas of military strategy and tactics, and unable, through a deficiency of imagination, to utilise to advantage the new weapons placed in his hands.

It is no disloyalty to the memory of a great soldier and a noble

Scotsman to say that he lacked some of the attributes of genius. He was a great leader, and will always be remembered as a brave and gallant general, but the dogged and obstinate persistence of the stereotyped attacks on Passchendaele were not justified by the results achieved.

That is Mr. Lloyd George's case, and it is the truth."

(FROM CHARLES D. RIGG.)

Extract from *The Daily Telegraph*, Tuesday 3rd July, 1934:—

"As a member of the Tank Corps, I was an actual witness of the conditions at Passchendaele which Mr. Lloyd George describes. It was deliberate murder to order men into action there during October, 1917. As a junior officer, I wondered why such senseless slaughter was allowed to continue.

Now I know that the Commander-in-Chief and his Chief-of-Staff never visited the battlefield during the course of the campaign. It seems to me this is inexcusable. But as a sincere admirer of Mr. Lloyd George's statesmanship during the War, may I ask why he himself did not motor along the Ypres-Menin road to Birr X-road to see the conditions for himself?

In October, 1917, Birr X-road was about two miles behind the front line. If he had taken such a ride, he would have been in no doubt about stopping Passchendaele.

At 'Clapham-junction,' a little way beyond Birr X-road, there was a place called 'Tank cemetery,' because of the number of tanks which lay derelict there, having been knocked out by field guns as they floundered in the mud."

(FROM D. E. HICKEY, Captain, late Tank Corps.)



## CHAPTER LXV

### THE CABINET'S DILEMMA

As it became clear to my mind in August that the Flanders attack would fail without achieving any of the purposes for which it had been commenced I made repeated efforts to stop the carnage. Gough had come to the same conclusion and without my knowledge was doing his best to secure a discontinuance of an operation of which he, better than anyone, realised the futility. The glowing accounts of shattering victories in September and October which were inspired by Headquarters, were greedily swallowed by a public thirsting for encouragement in their sacrifice. Ministers could not launch a publicity campaign to disillusion them. Public opinion in most of the Allied countries was disintegrating behind the lines. Russia was going out of the War, tired and torn. France was dejected, disappointed and inclined to be disaffected. Italy wanted an end of it, so long as it could find a decent get out. America was not yet in. She was in no hurry. Britain was still fighting with all her grim wont. In these circumstances one could not afford to tell her plainly that her vaunted successes were costly shams. Herein G.H.Q. had the politicians at a disadvantage and they made the fullest use of their vantage ground. An order from Downing Street to stop a fight which the British public were told was gradually but surely reducing all the renowned legions of the enemy to a broken and demoralised rabble of beaten and dispirited men, would not be tolerated.

When the offensive was in danger of an official mandate to stop it, newspaper proprietors, editors and publicists of all kinds were invited to the front—assuming that G.H.Q. could be included in that dangerous zone—to see for themselves how well things were going. They were brought there, not to witness the real struggle, but at a safe distance to enjoy the sensation of doing so, whilst partaking of the hospitality of the famous soldiers who planned the attacks. The battlefield was only seen by them in maps, shining and solid, where achieved advances were displayed without being defaced or pulped by the gruesome sludge, or disfigured by a mass of red dots representing casualties. They returned to England suitably impressed with the resistless advance of the great offensive. They saw for themselves on the spot that Ostend was not far—on the map. And Bruges was

already actually visible to our victorious army. Why stop when we were already in sight of complete victory?

What action ought I to have taken to ensure that the military mistakes which had exhausted the man-power and almost destroyed the morale of the Alliance should not be repeated in 1918? There were several courses open. The most obvious was to dismiss our Chief Military adviser, who had failed us so badly, and the Commander-in-Chief who had proved himself as a strategist to be unequal to the gigantic task committed to his charge. Let me deal first with the case of Sir Douglas Haig. It is easy now to say: "You ought to have sacked him." There is no man to-day, military or civilian, who does not deplore the Flanders offensive of 1917—not merely as a good idea badly bungled, but as a rash and ill-conceived venture impossible of execution under circumstances which must have been known or ought to have been known to those who planned it. At that date the campaign had its worshippers everywhere—except amongst those who fought through it. It was extolled in the Press and on the platforms, and a peremptory dismissal of the victor would have been regarded as if Wellington had been recalled after Badajoz. But apart from that I had to ask and answer another question. Who could be put in his place? It is a sad reflection that not one amongst the visible military leaders would have been any better. There were amongst them plenty of good soldiers who knew their profession and possessed intelligence up to a point. But Haig was all that and probably better within those limits than any others within sight. He was a good Corps Commander. But to command a group of great armies comprising 2,000,000 men on a battle front of over 100 miles was a position that demanded not ordinary capacity but intellect of an exceptionally high order. Haig's best friends will not claim for him that he was a man of that quality. He was a painstaking professional soldier with a sound intelligence of secondary quality. He had the courage and stubbornness of his race and also a large measure of their business capacity. In the Peninsular War he would have won renown as a General—under Wellington. In this war he would have done well as Commander of an Army Corps or an Army where the strategy was determined by a bigger man. He did well in the concluding stages of the 1918 campaign—under Foch's supreme direction. But he did not possess the necessary breadth of vision or imagination to plan a great campaign against some of the ablest Generals in the War. I never met any man in a high position who seemed to me so utterly devoid of imagination.

Haig had a gift of careful scrutiny of detail and gave his attention to the minutest point. That was an invaluable gift. Those things which were visible through ordinary professional glasses he could see more clearly than most soldiers; but when intuition and genius were necessary for vision, he did not possess the requisite intellectual

equipment. But which of them did? Had we removed Haig, we might have set up in his place a man who had not his mastery of the profession, with no other and greater gifts to make up for that deficiency. When I was considering the problem I sent General Smuts and Sir Maurice Hankey around the front to report to the War Cabinet on the condition of affairs generally, and I confidentially asked them to look and see for themselves whether amongst the Generals they met, there was one whom they considered might with advantage attain and fill the first place. They came back with a very disappointing report as to the result of their investigations. Since the War I have been told by men whose judgment I value that the only soldier thrown up by the War on the British side who possessed the necessary qualities for the position was a Dominion General. Competent professional soldiers whom I have consulted have all agreed that this man might and probably would have risen to the height of the great occasion. But I knew nothing of this at the time. No report ever reached me either as War Secretary or Prime Minister, which attributed any special merit to this distinguished soldier. The fact that he was a civilian soldier when the War broke out may have had something to do with the tardiness in recognising his exceptional abilities and achievements.

There were eminent Generals in the British Army who had shown conspicuous gifts in their spheres of leadership, but none of them was fitted to lead an army five times as large as Napoleon ever had under his command, in a military undertaking which would have tested even his genius to its utmost.

With regard to Sir William Robertson, he was not a strategist nor did he arrogate to himself the rôle of a planner of campaigns. I never believed that he had the mind for it. He was a good administrator. For the rest, he accepted Haig's strategy and subordinated everything to it. The part he chose to play was that of providing Haig with the necessary men and material to enable him to carry out his plans. In order to ensure that there should be no shortage in that respect, he cut down to the lowest limit the supplies sent to every other field of operations. That was the only strategic notion he ever contributed to the conduct of the War. Mr. Asquith, once upon a time, is related in one of his rare fits of emotional ecstasy, to have extolled Robertson as "the greatest living strategist." It was a ridiculous appreciation, but as neither of them had strategical minds, the giver and the recipient of the compliment were equally well fitted for their part in the tribute.

Sir William Robertson, in the book he wrote some years after the War, gives an account of the difficulties with which he was confronted in ascertaining the real truth about this ghastly battle.

He there states the reason why the operation continued for so long. It was due largely to "the belief at G.H.Q. that the strain imposed



upon the enemy was being so severely felt that it might soon reach breaking-point." He and his Staff thought this view "appeared a little too sanguine." He seems to have expressed his doubts to the Commander-in-Chief. Sir Douglas Haig on that occasion asked him to interview his Army Commanders and ascertain for himself whether they agreed with him. Sir William Robertson then adds: "That, of course, I could not well do." He was then invited to meet these Commanders at a conference which he was about to hold on the matter, and he proceeds: —

"I was not prepared to carry my doubts to the extent of opposing him, and of thereby obstructing the application of that little extra pressure upon the enemy which experience has so often shown may convert an inconclusive battle into a decisive victory.

*It is difficult to deny that the campaign was protracted beyond the limits of justification, but a correct decision was not so easy to make at the time as it appears now. . . .*"\*

He recalls the oft-quoted passage from Ludendorff about the anxiety the Germans felt up to the middle of September. He also pleads that: —

"It should be remembered that from the first the prospects of success had depended upon the British Armies being kept up to strength, whereas, owing to an inadequate man-power policy, they fell greatly below it."

He forgot that at the Cabinet Council when the Flanders project came up, one of the arguments I advanced against it was that we had almost reached the limit of man-power and that we could not increase the flow of recruits without causing damage to other essential war services and provoking serious labour troubles. The reply given then was that the losses would not be heavy. Sir William Robertson knew all about the difficulties we were experiencing in the matter of man-power because of the imperative necessity of countering the submarine danger, and wrote Haig as far back as May to warn him of the fact. I have already dwelt upon the practical difficulties we were experiencing, in the chapters on Submarines, Man-Power and Labour Unrest.

Although Sir William Robertson was practically in the position of a *Generalissimo*, since he had the authority of the Government behind him, he felt that he could not ask the Army Commander any question which implied that he had doubts as to the estimate formed by G.H.Q. on the progress of the attack. Had he done so they probably would not have given any opinion adverse to the then

\* My italics.

Commander-in-Chief. Although we know now, that several of the General officers who took part in the fight had grave doubts as to the wisdom of proceeding with it, not one of them uttered a murmur that reached me or any member of the Cabinet. So high is the standard of discipline amongst Generals. "Theirs not to reason why: theirs but to send their troops to die"—if the Commander-in-Chief orders it.

I am bound to record the fact that although Sir William Robertson tells the public, in his book of criticism on statesmen, that he had misgivings about the reports emanating from G.H.Q. and that he thought "the campaign was protracted beyond the limits of justification," he never hinted to those who were dependent on his advice that any doubts had ever entered his mind on these points.

Had we intervened, what would have been the effect on public opinion? It would have been said: "Here is that great soldier, Sir Douglas Haig, supported by his fine Army, beating the Germans, chasing them from pill-box to pill-box—killing two of their men for every one he lost of ours—pulverising their divisions so that there were not many now left in a condition for renewing the fight. They are already squealing for peace. The reason is obvious: they are gasping with exhaustion. We shall soon sweep them off the coveted ridge. Then the Flanders coast will be within our grasp. The lair of the submarine will be captured. We shall be released from that terror and danger. But just as Haig is about to finish off the Germans and achieve the greatest triumph of the War, here come these nervous and meddlesome politicians, who know nothing about war, and snatch victory out of the grasp of our gallant soldiers, throwing all our sacrifices away." Public opinion could only have been set right by telling the whole gruesome tale of failure and slaughter. We should also have had to reveal how everybody had been misled by the dispatches and reports concocted and inspired at Headquarters. What would have been the effect in France, Italy, Russia? What would have happened here at home? The French crisis based on acknowledged disaster in May, would have been followed by a British crisis founded on a still bloodier disaster in the autumn. Confidence in military leadership—in military veracity—would have gone. With Russia on the brink of going out and Italy sagging and France unstrung, we could not have faced the necessary revelations. The heart of the Allies would have been depressed, maybe beyond stimulation—the spirit of the Central Powers would have been renewed and reinvigorated. I decided that the risk was too great and that it was better to take measures in time that would prevent the recurrence in 1918 of the blunders to which we had been committed in 1917 by the Chantilly decisions of November, 1916. Maybe I was wrong. I state the facts so as to enable others to judge fairly.

I considered that Sir William Robertson had signally failed to

realise what his duty was as an independent adviser of the Imperial War Cabinet on military matters. He was not under Haig and therefore he owed him no obedience. There was no disciplinary obligation to prevent him from expressing an opinion which did not conform to that of the Commander in France.

What the Cabinet had to consider if they meant to dispense with the services of Robertson, was whether they should replace him with a man who was equipped for the task of thinking out and directing the strategy of the Allied campaign, or whether, if such a man were obtainable, it would not be better to put him in a position where he could act in more direct and constant co-operation with the military brains of the other Allies. If the Cabinet came to the latter conclusion, then Robertson might be left at the War Office. He was capable of directing efficiently all the administrative activities which would be brought into play by the policy adopted.

When the battle was finally called off, the Cabinet reviewed the results, and came to a decided and unanimous conclusion that it was a ghastly failure. Sir William Robertson was called into these consultations, and if he did not categorically agree with all that was said about the blunders perpetrated, he certainly expressed no dissent. He attributed the mistakes committed primarily to General Charteris' over-optimistic reports which misled Haig, and to General Kiggell's deficiencies as Chief of Staff. He was also disposed to blame General Gough for persisting in the attacks after it had become evident they could not possibly succeed. From his attitude at the time I assume that he was not then aware of Gough's protests. It was decided that the Commander-in-Chief should be called upon to remove these three Generals from the positions they then held. Sir William Robertson and Lord Derby were asked to proceed at once to G.H.Q. and communicate these decisions to Sir Douglas Haig. The Commander-in-Chief agreed to dismiss Charteris and Kiggell, but demurred to the Cabinet request for the removal of Gough. On this point he was obdurate. He did not assign the real reason for his refusal to dismiss Gough. Both Lord Derby and Sir William Robertson urged the Cabinet to accept the compromise, and we were assured that Gough's Army was to be taken away from the salient and placed in a quiet part of the line! So Kiggell and Charteris disappeared and Gough remained. This action was a practical admission by the C.I.G.S. that the Battle of Passchendaele was a grave blunder. History will decide whether he placed the responsibility for it on the right shoulders. I have already recorded the admission of Sir Douglas Haig that his great plan was a dangerous failure.

In considering whether we should have gone further and taken more drastic action by replacing Haig and Robertson, I had always to bear in mind the possibility that such a step would inevitably have



given rise to political complications. Both had a considerable backing in the Press and the House of Commons and inside the Government. The Asquithian Opposition were solid behind them. Northcliffe strongly supported both. They could also count on the support of a large contingent of influential Conservatives, of whom some were members of the Ministry. It was an incongruous combination, but too formidable to challenge at this stage. I never believed in costly frontal attacks either in war or politics, if there were a way round. In this case I sought and found one which in the end achieved the purpose.

## CHAPTER LXVI

### THE CAPORETTO DISASTER

THE Italian campaign of 1917 furnishes a complete illustration of the difficulties experienced by a military alliance of independent nations in formulating any common plan of action which must necessarily involve giving priority to one national front at a time. These difficulties are greatly enhanced, and are almost insuperable if it is found necessary to change plans already agreed to by the Commanders of all the national armies. It is next to impossible to persuade the majority of these generals to abandon operations on their own front for which they have made considerable preparation and of the success of which they are confident, in order to concentrate part of their strength on another front under another Commander. The fetters riveted on at Chantilly in November, 1916, ruined the Allied campaign in 1917. If any still doubt this after reading the story, faithfully told, of the Chemin des Dames and Passchendaele, let him peruse the following account of the Allied dealings with Italy.

Early in 1917, soon after the Rome Conference in January, there were indications that the Italian War Direction were feeling uneasy at the display of timorousness and indecision which had lost their country the best opportunity yet afforded to its armies to win a resounding triumph. Rumour as to what had occurred about the offer of the heavy guns spread through the Italian capital.

A popular young Socialist Deputy of the name of Bissolati heard of the proposal made to Cadorna by the British delegation and how he had shrunk from the guns offered to him, as if they had been pointed at his own breast.\* Bissolati had won popularity amongst all sections of opinion by his transparent sincerity, his ardent patriotism, his fine oratorical gifts, and his exceptional charm of manner. He had fought in the War and had been badly wounded. When he heard how the Italian representatives at the Conference, political and military, had allowed themselves to be intimidated into a stammering hesitancy when Italy had been offered a fine equipment of the best heavy artillery on any battlefield, he stirred opinion in Rome to recapture the lost chance. When the story reached the ears of the King of Italy he was not too well pleased.

\* See Chapter XLVII.

Signor Bissolati was sent over to England at the end of February on an informal mission to urge an Allied offensive against Austria and to sound the British Government on the probability of their renewing the offer made at the Rome Conference. But by that time we were so committed to the projected offensive in France that it was deemed inadvisable to withdraw any weight from the attack by sending a large consignment of heavy guns to Italy. In the middle of March, Sir William Robertson was sent by the Cabinet to Italy to carry out the decision of the Rome Conference as to arrangements for sending troops to the Italian Front in the event of a combined attack by Germans and Austrians. Before he started, a communication was received from General Cadorna indicating his opinion that the Germans might at any time set free sufficient troops for a decisive attack on the Italian Front. In the event of their adopting such a plan, a combined force of 90 German and Austrian Divisions could, according to him, be concentrated on the Italian Fronts. General Cadorna doubted whether, in such a contingency, the Anglo-French offensive on the Western Front would have sufficient effect to relieve the military difficulties on the Italian Front, and urged that a scheme should be prepared for the direct reinforcement of the Italian Army from the West *by 20 divisions*.

From the extreme of reluctance to welcome any assistance he had dashed to the other extreme of asking too much. In practice it answered the same purpose. Nothing was done. I have seen the same device practised in other cases by military leaders who had an understanding with each other, when a certain section of civilian opinion had to be propitiated, but where at the same time the generals were anxious to prevent any steps being taken which would involve a departure from plans of a different character already agreed to amongst themselves.

The Italian appeal was discussed at the War Cabinet. I recalled the proposals I had made at the Rome Conference urging the preparation by the Allied Staffs not only of a defensive on the Italian Front, but also for a combined offensive, and I pointed out that "General Cadorna and the Italian Government had then received these proposals in a somewhat lukewarm manner." However, the C.I.G.S., Sir William Robertson, undertook to give special attention to the whole question during his forthcoming visit to Italy.

Later on in March, I received a pressing letter from the British Ambassador in Rome describing the very grave apprehension of Baron Sonnino as to the probability of a heavy attack by the Central Powers on the Italian Front, and expressing Baron Sonnino's regrets "that the proposals made by the Prime Minister at Rome for Allied co-operation on the Italian Front had not been carried out." I replied to Sir Rennell Rodd that the War Cabinet fully shared Baron Sonnino's apprehension, and that Sir William Robertson had



already been sent to Italian Headquarters for the express purpose of going into the matter. When Sir William Robertson returned from Rome he reported that there was undoubtedly a possibility of a German attack on the Italian frontier. It is worthy of passing comment, in view of the gibes at "civilian strategy," that the Military Conference at Chantilly, in making plans for 1917, had undertaken no preparations to meet the possibility of a joint enemy offensive against Italy. That contingency was pointed out by a politician at the Rome Conference, and he was responsible for the proposal to take immediate steps to prepare transport and other arrangements to counter such an offensive. Upon a full consideration of all the communications which had been received from Italy, the War Cabinet decided to offer to lend the Italian Government ten batteries of six-inch howitzers with their personnel, and a suggestion was made that the Italians should apply to the French for field-guns. Our guns were to be sent to Italy forthwith and were timed to arrive there to help General Cadorna in the offensive operations which he had planned.

Early in April, M. Painlevé, the French Secretary of State for War, spoke to me about my plan of a combined offensive on the Italian Front. He informed me that General Pétain and other French Generals had expressed doubts about the offensive planned by General Nivelle and that as an alternative they suggested the sending of eight divisions, four British and four French to Italy. He said that not only was he personally of opinion that a combined attack on the Italian Front might have the effect of inflicting such a defeat upon Austria as would induce her to withdraw from the Central Alliance, but that the distinguished generals whom he named were also of opinion that such an attack delivered by the Italians with substantial help from the French and the British might produce decisive results. General Nivelle, who was then Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, had however not been consulted, and M. Painlevé's own colleagues in the Government, including his Chief, had expressed no opinion on the subject. It was not an authoritative offer upon which I was entitled to take action. Moreover, the British attack on the Arras Front had already actually commenced. I felt it was too late then suddenly to change our plans and I indicated that we might discuss the project later, after we had seen whether the offensive which had just been launched had succeeded or failed. Later on, when it had proved to be a disappointment, and General Nivelle had been dismissed from the High Command and General Pétain put in his place, the latter did not feel that he was in a position to renew the proposal. He was too much occupied in quelling the mutinies in the Army and restoring the morale of his troops. I reported the Painlevé conversation to the War Cabinet. Sir William Robertson was present, and gave it as his opinion that it would be a mistake to send these divisions to Italy, as General Cadorna had all

the infantry he wanted. No doubt he had at that time an overwhelming preponderance of men. The Italians had then 1,500,000 men at the front as against only 650,000 Austrians ranged against them. The Russian Army was still in being, and therefore the Austrians could not weaken that front. What the Italians lacked in order to make their offensive a real success was not men but guns and ammunition. The C.I.G.S. reported to us that he understood the "French military authorities were opposed to sending troops to Italy." That meant that General Nivelle and his Staff were opposed to the proposal. Pétain and Micheler certainly favoured the idea. The whole story of the war dealings with Italy shows how difficult it was in a Coalition of far-flung nations and armies to get away from plans to which they had all agreed and for which they had all prepared. Had the French Government supported the proposal when the British delegates submitted it to the Rome Conference, and committed themselves in January to a spring offensive against Austria as their main strategical plan, instead of one which was merely a supplement to an attack on the German lines in France, the whole military situation would have been transformed. The new Austrian Emperor was anxious for peace, and as I have already recorded, had communicated in March with the French Government, through his brother-in-law, Prince Sixte, suggesting separate negotiations with the Allies.

But, at the very hour when I was reporting the Painlevé interview to the Cabinet, our troops were storming the Vimy Ridge. Could we have wired them to stop their victorious advance and ordered them to take the train for Italy, because one French Minister and two Generals had, without consultation with their superiors, suggested dropping an offensive for which the French were primarily responsible and to which they had committed us much against our own judgment? Painlevé was an influential Minister, and the Generals he quoted in support of his plan were among the ablest and most important in the French Army, but both the Minister and the Generals made the suggestion without any authority from their respective chiefs.

Sir Rennell Rodd, in a letter he wrote to me, gave it as his opinion that pride would never permit the Austrians, even if Cadorna's offensive had been a success, to make any concessions to Italy, but if their defeat had been the result of an attack by an offensive in which British and French troops as well as Italians had been engaged, they would have taken a completely different view of the situation, and might then have been induced to surrender part of their territory as a condition of peace.

The promised howitzers were duly dispatched to the Italian Front. Our gunners received a great ovation when they reached Milan. The Italian Prime Minister reported that their arrival had a very good

political effect. Even as a gesture of friendship and goodwill this contribution from the British Army had its moral value. The 40 howitzers left France the second week in April, they arrived on the Italian Front in a few days, and they were all in position and ready to take part in the offensive on the Carso before the end of April. So they would have been had we sent 300 guns instead of 40. It would not have taken much longer. All the talk about the time it would take to send artillery with its quota of ammunition was deliberately exaggerated in order to excuse inaction. What happened after Caporetto abundantly demonstrated that fact.

The offensive started well. The Italians stormed formidable positions and captured a considerable number of prisoners, but unfortunately they had to suspend a promising operation for "lack of heavy artillery ammunition." The same deficiency all round was responsible for an inadequate bombardment which caused heavy losses to the Italian Army. It was the same old story. The British and French heavy guns with a lavish expenditure of shell were insufficient to storm the elaborate German fortresses in France, defended as they were by the best troops of the greatest army in the field, supported by an abundant reserve of troops and by an equal, if not superior, artillery to that of the assailants. But a few hundred of these guns with an adequate supply of ammunition sent to Italy—especially if the Italians had been assisted to make up the deficiency in the supply of ammunition for their own guns—would have broken a front held by troops inferior in numbers, training and equipment, and possessing insufficient reserves upon which they could rely. The break might have been exploited before the Germans could have rushed sufficient reinforcements to the assistance of their defeated Allies. The Germans were expecting a serious attack in France. Allied guns could have been transported to Italy without their knowledge. The enemy engineered a surprise on the Italian Front in October with considerable artillery and troops, sending six German divisions and artillery thither, without our suspecting the movement. Why was it impossible for us to execute the same manœuvre in May? There is no explanation except the fanaticism of the Western Front. This infatuation prevented the experienced military leaders of France and Britain giving any thought to the possibilities of the Italian Front and how they might best be exploited in the general interest of the Allies. At least no thought was given to the question until it was too late to act effectively.

The Italians promised to renew their offensive in August, but they now realised thoroughly that their artillery equipment was unequal to the task of recapturing the Austrian entrenchments, and General Cadorna appealed to the French and ourselves for heavy artillery. In July Cadorna communicated confidentially to us his views of the military position:—



"He thought that if the Russians maintained their pressure, this with the Italian offensive would lead to the disintegration of the Austrian Army.

He had, he said, always considered this to be the strategical object which the Allies should strive for, as if attained it would automatically cut off Bulgarians and Turks from their conjunction with Germany and make it possible to act with overwhelming effect against Germany. He said he doubted the possibility of defeating Germany on the Western Front, as even if pushed back further, the Germans could still take up a line resting on River Meuse and their fortresses and for a long time to come continue to defy any enemy."

It may be said that his view of the possibilities on the Western Front was falsified by events. It is true the German line was broken in the autumn of 1918, but the British and French troops had lost another 2,500,000 in the efforts made since the Rome Conference. They had the help of a million American troops. Even then the Germans were never driven beyond the Meuse and the Armistice was signed on French soil after a revolution had taken place in Germany.

"It was for this reason, he said, that he had always urged to be supplied with more heavy artillery, as it was heavy artillery which was most important for the offensive and it is the arm in which unfortunately he is most deficient."

Why did he not talk like this at the Rome Conference, where something might have been accomplished on these lines? Had he spoken up for his ideas then, the Conference would have taken a different turn. When I suggested in his presence the very strategical plan he now urged in writing and afterwards, he never uttered a word in support of the idea. He now proceeded to give our representatives his explanation of the French reluctance to assent to a combined offensive on the Italian Front.

"He said he thought the French desired to concentrate all interest on the front in France and were reluctant to give much artillery help to Italy, as *speaking frankly, they were rather jealous of any military success that Italy might achieve.*"

Cadorna's appeal reached us about the middle of July, when Haig was giving the last finishing touches to the preparations for his rash venture in Flanders. He had been given a reluctant and conditional sanction for his attempt by the War Cabinet. The guns for which Cadorna pleaded were already placed and pointed at the German

entrenchments in front of Ypres, and shortly afterwards started the ghastly process of churning up the mud in which so many of our devoted soldiers sank for ever.

At the same time Foch received the following telegram from Cadorna:—

“ 16th July, 1917.

The successful development of Russian offensive justifies suppositions foreseen by us that in the near future a situation similar to that which I foresaw in my telegram of 26th June (in which we asked France and England to supply 25 batteries and 13,200 rounds) may arise on the Front of the Julian Alps. I may state too, that from information received and by direct observation of movements behind the lines, the first symptoms of this are already visible. Consequently, the necessity of putting forward the date of our offensive as much as possible is evident, and on the other hand, on account of *our munitions crisis which the recent help from France and England reduced but did not solve, it seems as if the offensive in question cannot be begun before the end of August.* In my telegram quoted above I have already shown you that 100 guns with 1,000 rounds each are absolutely necessary to make up deficiency of munitions. But if General Pétain cannot spare the batteries which have been asked for and considers they can be better employed on the Franco-British Front, I must point out the serious consequences which the common cause of the Allies may suffer by not taking advantage of the particularly favourable strategical situation now developing on the Front of the Julian Alps and by giving up the advantages of a simultaneous attack with necessary means on both Austrian Fronts. In any case if decision of the General Staff is irrevocable kindly communicate above message to General Foch and ask him to use his influence with General Robertson to accept responsibility of finding at least part of the batteries which we have asked for and of the supplying of which to my certain knowledge the British Government is in favour.”

On this our Military Attaché at Paris reported:—

“ I am informed by General Weygand that General Foch and General Pétain consider the matter to be of the greatest importance. The latter, who is extremely short of artillery, nevertheless, decided to send six batteries at once.

General Foch looks upon the matter as follows:—

‘ It is necessary to take Cadorna at his word so as not to give him an excuse for not attacking. If Cadorna considers the moment favourable for attack everything should be done to help him,

especially in view of the fact that a separate peace has been openly discussed in Hungarian Parliament and because all information from Russia tends to show that when attacks at present in preparation have taken place, they will not be renewed. Therefore a very favourable situation now exists, which might not be renewed for a year. General Weygand asked me to urge upon you very strongly the great importance of sending to Italy as much artillery as could be spared.' ”

The Cabinet instructed the C.I.G.S. immediately to get in touch with the French and Italian experts. A conference of Generals Foch, Cadorna and Robertson was held in Paris on the 24th July. Cadorna appealed to Foch and Robertson for ten divisions and 400 heavy guns and claimed that with that help he could inflict a decisive defeat on Austria. Foch was inclined to listen to this proposal. He had a poor opinion of the Flanders attack and would have preferred sending to Italy the divisions and guns he had promised us for that enterprise. But Robertson dug in his toes and refused to budge. He doggedly held the Cabinet to its assent. He had given our undertaking to Haig that he should be permitted to launch his attack. If it succeeded the results would be greater than any we could expect in Italy. If it failed, then we could try Italy. But it was agreed that Ostend must come first and then Italy. The consequence was that we never came in sight of Ostend and we never reached Italy except in November to support an Italian Army broken by the “ demoralised and exhausted ” German divisions that had come from holding us up at Passchendaele until our feet were thoroughly stuck in the Flemish bog.

Once more Cadorna gave in. As to whether he was a good fighter in the field I cannot express an opinion. In Conference he abandoned his position at the first counter-attack. The conclusions reached at this Conference of Allied Generals in Paris were that: —

“ In view of the *primary importance of this objective of finally defeating Austria*, it was decided to examine, when the operations now in progress are finished, the situation which will result therefrom, as well as the desirability and possibility of placing at the disposal of Italy the forces necessary to enable her to attain this objective.”

As the operations then in progress did not finish until November, the Germans struck first on the Italian Front.

The Conference illustrates the difficulty under which the War Cabinet laboured in the conduct of the War owing to the Chantilly commitment. Foch, Pétain and Cadorna were good soldiers with



actual experience of this War and the conditions under which it was fought. They were convinced of the primary importance of finally defeating Austria. But Robertson said that this must wait on Passchendaele. In practical experience of fighting under modern conditions Robertson did not approach these three men. But he beat them all in a rigid and unreasoning stubbornness that was not open to argument or persuasion. He flourished the Chantilly agreement in their faces and held them to their bond, which was just as binding but more comprehensive than that of Shylock, for it included the spilling of blood. To all the appeals of Cadorna and the calm reasoning of Pétain, he had but one answer:—

“I'll have my bond; I will not hear thee speak:

I'll have my bond; And therefore speak no more. . . .”

His sole concern was for the Flanders offensive to which he had committed himself. He was not there to confer or to consider. He went there to say “The Bond.” He said it, and stuck to it, and got it. As long as he was C.I.G.S. we could not send anyone else to represent us at an Inter-Allied Military Conference—except Sir Douglas Haig. That would not have improved matters. His thoughts also were fixed on what he was assured would be the crowning victory of the War.

We had therefore either to proceed with the Ostend operation or to dismiss both Robertson and Haig and appoint Generals who were not so committed. The Cabinet were not prepared for so sensational a change. I have already dealt candidly with the reasons. The guns had already opened fire on the slopes of Passchendaele and in a few days the infantry would advance to attack the German trenches. The first assault achieved a measure of success which, if it did not vindicate the project, at any rate did not justify its immediate abandonment. The first check came when we made our next efforts to break through. Early in August it became more and more evident that the great break through to the coast could not be accomplished, certainly not without colossal losses. The fight was developing into a second and more hopeless Somme.

On the 7th and 8th August there was an Inter-Allied Conference in London. Amongst other subjects that came up for discussion were the possibilities of an offensive on the Italian Front. Baron Sonnino raised the question. The discussion will show that by that date the Italians were getting discouraged. After the last failure of Cadorna to persuade Robertson, he had gone back to Italy with his ardour cooled for an offensive this year. His chill had been caught by his Government and his Staff. They had reverted to their January attitude. In introducing the subject Sonnino said that at the present moment the British Army was making a big effort on the British

Front in France, but the Italian General Staff were convinced that one of the weakest enemy fronts was that on the Carso and that it was one where a strong attack would pay best. An Italian offensive would shortly begin, but Italy was not strong enough in guns and munitions to press the offensive to a decision even if it started well. He dwelt on the advantages of really crushing Austria and suggested that if the Allies could help, especially in the provision of heavy guns (400 had been suggested as being required) something really effective might be done.

General Foch thought that it might be to Austria's interest, after a partial defeat to make a separate peace. A great attack on the Carso might lead to the fall of Trieste, and Austria might then be willing to treat. But this was not by any means certain. It was, however, a serious possibility, and the military means of bringing it about deserved consideration. He was of opinion that if we could not expect to achieve a complete defeat of the enemy, at any rate we might bring about a situation in which either Austria or Turkey might be glad to come to terms.

When it became apparent that the Allies were prepared seriously to consider a combined offensive in Italy, as usual the Italian Staff began to haver and hesitate. General Albricci represented the Italian Army in the absence of Cadorna. Whilst professing to welcome any support the Allies could accord to the Italians, he said in reply to a question I put to him as to when their Army could launch an offensive:—

“The latest season was the end of August, after that an offensive must wait till the end of the spring, say 15th May.”

This answer, of course, disposed of any idea of a combined Allied attack in Austria during 1917. General Albricci stuck to his view, even though he was strongly pressed on all sides.

I observed that I had always thought myself that the best policy was for the Allies to try really to crush Austria. I had made the suggestion in Rome, and it was then considered too early. I made it now, *and it was apparently considered too late*. I contrasted the method of the Central Powers in pooling their resources, which enabled them to drive back and break up great armies and to hold a vast extent of enemy territory, with the Allies' efforts which, gallant though they were, only chipped a few bits off a granite rock. I considered it a great misfortune that the Allies could not deliver one big smashing blow. I criticised the methods hitherto adopted for settling Allied military plans, and urged that in future the strategy of the Allies should be determined not by soldiers meeting separately and independently of statesmen, but at gatherings where the points of view and the experience they each represented could be pooled.

The Generals examined the proposition put before them by the Conference and decided it would be too late to send any batteries to Italy after Haig had attained his first objective. The lure of Passchendaele and the timidity of the Italian Staff had effectively done in not the politicians, but Italy, the Allies and most grievously of all, the chances of a favourable peace in 1917.

That was the end of the project of a combined offensive in Italy. Unfortunately, the Germans took a different view of the possibilities of that front in the late autumn and the early winter. They knew that an offensive late in October was a feasible operation.

As the futile massacres of August piled up the ghastly hecatombs of slaughter on the Ypres Front without achieving any appreciable result, I repeatedly approached Sir William Robertson to remind him of the condition attached to the Cabinet's assent to the operation. It was to be abandoned as soon as it became evident that its aims were unattainable this year and our attention was to be concentrated on an Italian offensive. He was immovable. He attributed the slowness of our progress to the exceptional rains. As soon as the weather improved we should sweep onward. As we know now, ten weeks more fighting with huge casualties gave us two more miles and then the furthest point was reached, without the achievement of any strategical result. But Robertson still believed in the possibility of great things after we had worn down the enemy's strength. According to him everything pointed to the growing exhaustion of the German Army. Why give in when we might be near a real triumph for our arms? I especially recollect a conversation with him, when he came down at my request to a house in Sussex where I was taking a few days' rest qualified by papers and interviews. (One of these interviews had been with Baron Sonnino.) From the lawn we could hear the thud of the guns of Passchendaele. To all my pleadings Robertson tendered a sullen negative. His final answer to my plea I only read long afterwards. It was a long message to Cadorna making it clear that he must expect no help from us. The Passchendaele offensive was to be pressed for several more weeks and we could spare neither guns nor men for Italy. The communication is so characteristic of his general attitude that it is worth reproducing:—

“ War Office,  
Whitehall, London, S.W.  
17th August, 1917.

To: His Excellency Lieut.-General Count L. Cadorna, G.C.B.

My dear General,

You are probably aware that at the recent Allied Conference in London, of 8th August, 1917, the following resolutions were agreed to:—



(1) The representatives of the three Governments agreed that the British, French and Italian General Staffs should be directed:—

(a) To consult as to the operations which should be initiated with a view to striking at Austria and as to the best time to begin such operations;

(b) To advise as to the theatres where, during the winter months, substantial results can be achieved, and as to the best methods of obtaining those results;

(c) To consider how to provide more heavy guns for an Italian offensive, either out of existing stocks, or by the creation of new stocks;

(d) To advise the Governments at their next informal meeting as to the result of their consultations.

(2) It was decided that a further meeting of representatives of the principal Allies should be held in Paris between 10th and 15th September.

(3) My views on the points upon which the Allied Governments require information are as follows:—

(a) I understand the term 'striking at Austria' to mean dealing Austria such a decisive blow as would induce her to make peace. It is clear that the only front from which there is any prospect of the Allies being able to strike such a blow at present is the Italian Front. I am of opinion that to make such a blow possible from the Italian Front it is necessary that the Austrians should be prevented from reinforcing their troops now opposed to you to any considerable extent, and that at the same time Germany must be prevented from coming to the aid of her ally. The first of these conditions can only be met if the efficiency of the Russian Armies is restored to an extent which will compel Austria to keep on the Eastern Front approximately the number of divisions she now has there. The second conditions can only be met if Germany is prevented from moving her reserves from the Western Front to the Italian theatre.\* Unless this is done the great superiority of the enemy's communications over those between the Western Front and Italy will always enable Germany to counter effectively any reinforcement of the Italian Armies by the British and French Armies. This makes it necessary that the blow to be struck from the Italian Front should be combined with operations on a large scale, carried through with determination on the Western Front.

\* What about the German divisions sent to Riga and Caporetto, whilst we were attacking with all our strength in Flanders?

Unless the two conditions above mentioned are fulfilled it does not, at present, seem possible to deal Austria a decisive blow.

As to the best time to begin operations against Austria, you alone are in a position to decide, and I shall be glad to hear whether you have in any way modified the views that you expressed at the Conference in Paris on the 24th July, 1917. In this connection I cannot say when the operations now in progress in Flanders may be concluded, but they will certainly continue for many weeks, and until the result of them is known, and the development of the situation on the Russian Front can be more clearly forecasted than at present, it will not be possible for me to say whether it may, or may not, be desirable to transfer any troops or guns from that theatre to the Italian Front or when such a transfer, if desirable, can begin.

Further, it is also necessary to consider the contingency that the enemy, if he is enabled to withdraw troops from the Eastern Front, may concentrate them against the Franco-British Front and that it may be impossible for that reason to weaken our forces in France. Meantime, as you are aware, such preliminary arrangements as are possible regarding the movements of troops from the Western Front to Italy have been prepared by our Staffs in consultation.

*(b) As to the possibility of obtaining substantial results during the winter, I think we should each speak for the theatres in which our troops are employed.*

As to the Western Front, the conditions of weather and ground during the winter do not make substantial results possible, but I am of opinion that the methods adopted last winter on the British Front in France should be continued this winter, and that every possible effort should be made to take advantage of our superior resources in guns and ammunition, and of the superior morale of our troops, to harass and wear down the enemy.

As to the Salonika Front, I adhere to the opinion which I have already expressed to you more than once, that no substantial result can be achieved either during the winter or at any other time except in combination with a decisive attack delivered on Bulgaria from the north, and I see no prospect of this maturing during the coming winter. The extent to which substantial results can be attained in Mesopotamia and Palestine depends upon the situation on the Russian Fronts in Asiatic Turkey, and I shall be prepared to explain when we meet, the arrangements I have made for operations in these theatres.

*(c) As to the question of providing you with more heavy guns those from existing stocks can only come from the British Armies in France, and, as I have already stated above, it is not possible at present for me to say how many batteries can be made available or indeed if they can be sent at all. As to the possibility of*

providing you with guns from new stocks, I am making enquiries of the British Minister of Munitions and will have the information when we next meet, but you will understand that this also depends upon the requirements of the British Armies in France, which in turn depends upon the development of the operations now in progress.

I shall be obliged if you will give me your views on the questions raised by our Governments, and will inform me when and where it will be convenient for us to have a meeting with General Foch, so that we may prepare a joint reply to be presented to the Allied Conference which is to assemble in Paris between 10th and 15th September, 1917.

Yours sincerely,  
W. R. ROBERTSON."

This letter was not shown to me. It might otherwise have been couched in different terms. It emphatically stamped on Cadorna's faint hopes of receiving any effective assistance in men or guns from the British Army.

Cadorna was about to launch another attack. It was not a stimulating letter to be sent to a General on the eve of a battle. This onslaught shared the usual fate of Italian offensives. It started well, promised considerable results, but had to be abandoned for lack of ammunition. General Delmé-Radcliffe wrote imploring us to send help. I wrote to the C.I.G.S.:—

"26th August, 1917.

My dear Chief of Staff,

The Italian attack seems to me to be developing well, and judging by the reports that come from Delmé-Radcliffe, there are great possibilities in it if fully and promptly exploited. I can, of course, only judge by what he says, but his account of the Austrian demoralisation and of their lack of reserves—both confirmed by the number of prisoners and guns captured and the extent of the ground occupied—seems to me to indicate immediate prospects of a signal military victory on that front. I need hardly point out that the overthrow of the Austrian Army might produce in the present condition of Austrian public opinion decisive results on the whole campaign. *I was therefore very distressed to find from one of Delmé-Radcliffe's reports that Cadorna apprehended that these brilliant possibilities might be rendered unattainable owing to the imminent exhaustion of the Italian reserves of ammunition.* Do you not think that a new situation has arisen there which requires immediate action on the part of the Allies to support the Italian attack, make up their deficiencies and enable them to convert the Austrian retreat into a rout? It would indeed be a severe reflection upon us all if later on it were discovered that we missed a great



chance of achieving a signal and far-reaching military success for the Allied cause, through lack of readiness to take advantage of an opening made for us by the Italian Army.

I feel confident that you are watching events with anxious scrutiny. If you think that the Italian victory is capable of being pressed to important conclusions would it not be worth while your paying an immediate visit to that front to judge for yourself and to form an independent opinion as to what might be accomplished if the French and ourselves were to make sacrifices which would enable Cadorna to press on until the Austrian Army completely breaks?

Once more I would impress upon you and the War Cabinet the enormous responsibility that rests upon us not to allow the most promising opening which events have thrown in our way in any Western theatre to come to nought for want of opportune support.

I should be obliged if you would mention this communication to the Cabinet this morning. I am writing to Mr. Bonar Law on the same subject.

Ever sincerely,

D. LLOYD GEORGE."

As I was still in the country, I wrote at the same time to Bonar Law to beg him to bring pressure to bear on Robertson:—

"27th August, 1917.

My dear Bonar,

I enclose letter which I am sending by special messenger to the C.I.G.S. I have followed Delmé-Radcliffe's reports very closely and unless he is over-sanguine the events which are taking place on the Italian Front indicate overwhelming possibilities if promptly exploited. There are undoubted signs of demoralisation in the Austrian Army, and if it is pressed hard and continuously for another fortnight or three weeks there seems to me to be a very fair chance of a rout, with consequences which no one can foresee. As you know, Austria is anxious for peace. A great military defeat would supply her with the necessary excuse. Cadorna says his heavy ammunition will not last much longer, and that you ought to call for Delmé-Radcliffe's report on this point, and this corresponds with the information we had before the action. We should never be forgiven if we allowed such an opportunity to go by for lack of prompt action, and we should not deserve to be forgiven. It may be said that it is too late now to send guns and ammunition. But it must be borne in mind that if Cadorna is informed that guns and ammunition are being sent he can then afford to draw on his reserves and fire his last cartridge, whereas if there is nothing more coming he will have to stop in order to have the necessary supply of ammunition to meet the inevitable counter-attacks. I cannot believe that transport difficulties would

stand in the way if a real effort were made. I understand that the Taranto Route is actually carrying some hundreds of tons a day already, and can carry more. But, in addition to that, special efforts might be made which would take guns and ammunition to the Italian Front in a few days.

I beg the War Cabinet to take this matter into serious consideration, and specially to urge the Chief of Staff to pay an immediate visit to the Italian Front with a view to form an independent judgment as to the possibilities. That is, of course, in the event of his not being satisfied with the reports that come from Delmé-Radcliffe. If Sir William Robertson cannot see his way to go, what about asking General Smuts to go at once to Italy to report?

If you wish it, I could come up for the afternoon to discuss this matter.

Ever sincerely,

D. LLOYD GEORGE.

P.S.—If the Allied Armies from the North Sea to the Adriatic were under one command, I have no doubt as to the course which would be pursued. Surely our strategy ought to be based on the assumption that it is all one front."

Bonar Law failed to make any impression on Robertson. Cadorna, finding there was no help forthcoming, gave up the ghost of his starved offensive.

Having read and assimilated Robertson's discouraging missive of the 17th August the Italian Commander-in-Chief had made up his mind that there was no hope of securing adequate assistance from his Allies and that therefore he must postpone his offensive until May, 1918. Here is his reply to Robertson's message:—

"Comando Supremo,

Royal Italian Army.

29th August, 1917.

I thank you for your note and am glad to find myself in complete identity of views with you on all questions which are so clearly set forth in it. First of all, on that from which all the others depend, on the necessity of striking Austria so heavy a blow on the Italian Front as to prostrate her and induce her to make peace.

(a) I recognise also—following the sequence of the questions put to the General Staffs by the representatives of Governments at the conference in London—that the condition indispensable in order successfully to translate into fact the strategical plan of beating down Austria, is that the Austrian forces should be held fast on the Eastern Front and the German held on the Western Front. Should Russia remain in arms (the opposite hypothesis is provided for in the plan agreed upon in Paris during the sitting on the 26th July) the first condition is fulfilled at once, in so far as it is not

likely that Austria would be induced to weaken considerably in the Eastern theatre the number of divisions engaged to-day, which is hardly sufficient to hold the extensive Russo-Roumanian Front for which she is responsible.

As regards the second condition, there can be no doubt as to the necessity for preventing Germany from moving her strategic reserves towards the Italian theatre, by means of operations on a large scale by the British and French Armies on the Western Front.

Still the contribution of the Allies to Italy, as to which a preliminary agreement was made at the conference in Paris, cannot, in any way, prejudice the putting into effect of this programme because, on the one hand, the contribution itself is small as compared with the powerful Anglo-French masses which have operated this year, and because it will be amply compensated for by the ever-increasing efficiency of your means of offence, and, above all, by the progressive intervention of the United States.

Allied aid to Italy and operations on a large scale on the Western Front are therefore two points in the same question which, judged in their proper relation to each other, appear to be perfectly compatible.

As regards the most suitable time to launch the Inter-Allied offensive, I indicate—in accordance with views expressed by me at the conference in Paris—next May; and this taking into consideration that our offensives, still in full course on the respective fronts, certainly do not permit of undertaking another, and still greater offensive effort within the current year.

(b) As regards the attitude to be taken up during the winter, excluding by reason of the season, the possibility of carrying on operations which might yield substantial and decisive results, I am in agreement with you in thinking that each of our armies should look to its own front, holding and wearing down the opposed enemy forces and economising its own for future and decisive struggles.

As regards the Salonika Front, I have nothing to add to your point of view.

(c) As regards the question of the supplies of heavy artillery I thank you and take note of what you tell me and will await the communications which you inform me you will make.

Having thus set forth in detail my ideas which, I repeat, are in principle in conformity with yours, I do not consider necessary for the moment, another meeting between us, which, apart from taking us away, if even only for a short time, from the operations in which each of our armies is at the present time intensively engaged, could not, in view of the present indefinite situation and at such a distance in time from the period in which the operations will take



place, render more concrete the undertakings which have already been established.

I am sending a copy of this letter to General Foch in order to establish between us as complete and exhaustive an exchange of views as possible; and, with the same object in view, I am forwarding to you a copy of the letter which I have to-day addressed to General Foch, in which I have expressed some of my ideas on the constitution of the Allied contingent.

Please receive, my dear General, the assurance of my warmest feeling and accept my cordial greetings.

L. CADORNA."

I have in my possession Cadorna's reply to Foch, from which it seems that the French were prepared to send troops to Italy to assist in the contemplated offensive. The continuation of the Flanders attack frustrated this project, for Foch could not spare divisions unless they were withdrawn from the fatuous attacks on the Houthulst forest to which French G.H.Q. were committed by their agreement with Haig. Passchendaele was effectively preparing the ground for Caporetto.

One must consider the military position at that moment in order to appreciate what a disaster befell the cause of the Allies at Caporetto. Russia with its innumerable millions of men, in quality equal to the finest fighting material in the field, was completely and finally out of the reckoning. As the revolution developed the disintegrating influence became more apparent amongst the Russian Armies at the front. Germany and Austria were thus in a position to withdraw some of their best divisions from the East. The armistice of Brest-Litovsk was signed on the 17th December, 1917, and then what was left of the choicest divisions of the German and Austrian Armies on that frontier were liberated from their stern vigil. 1918 demonstrated that Germany could treat her armies on that front as a depot for filling up depleted units on the Western Front. Russia had ceased to be a military anxiety for her. The Serbians were hardly an army—merely a few shrivelled divisions, recruited from gallant refugees who had escaped the great debacle and maintained their spirit in spite of it. Roumania had been ruthlessly crushed and was now a source of supply to the enemy. America was as yet only nominally in the War. She was not represented in the fighting line anywhere by a single platoon. By the following spring she had only one division in the line and three in reserve. The rest were still performing their equivalent of "forming fours." The French Army had not yet recovered from the terrible exhaustion of blood and nerve which culminated in the breakdown of April, 1917. It was still resting under General Pétain's careful nursing. Now and again its recovering health was tested in carefully prepared and well executed

"limited offensives." The Italians had abandoned their attacks and were looking forward to a winter of rest and recuperation. The British alone were fighting on land and sea with the whole of their might. Their valiant army was plunged by its leaders into the swamps of Passchendaele, where its strength was exhausted and its fine spirit damped by that muddy enterprise. The fatuous muddle of Cambrai showed that the Army could not extricate its strength from the slime sufficiently to enable it to strike an effective blow in any other direction. Altogether a propitious moment for the great coup against Italy; and it would have succeeded completely had it not been foreseen as a probability and provided against as the result of the Rome Conference. Let me tell the story as I saw it.

Holding the Allied Armies in France with its right, the German Army, late in October, hit out with its left at the head of the Italian Army in the Styrian Alps. The Teutonic blow fell with staggering effect. The Italian Army reeled backward, stunned and confused. In 16 days it retreated 70 miles, losing 600,000 in dead, wounded and prisoners and missing (including those who threw away their arms in the debacle and were scattered over the face of Northern Italy). Of the deficient Italian equipment in guns, 3,152 were captured by the enemy. The ground lost was considerable but it was not nearly as serious as the loss in men and guns and ammunition. In both these respects the Allies were already at a disadvantage in comparison with the Central Powers. The Italian disaster increased the discrepancy to an alarming extent.

Was the disaster irreparable? On important parts of the front the Italian Army still held; on others the retreat was conducted in an orderly manner, the enemy advance being skilfully delayed and embarrassed; in some places the retreat was a headlong rout of broken units, leaving behind a litter of guns, waggons, ammunition and even rifles. Would the panic spread? The fate of Italy, peradventure of Europe, depended on the answer given by the next few days. If the Italian Army were destroyed as an effective force, the great cities of the North, which constituted the main arsenals of Italy, would fall into Teutonic hands, and once more the road to Rome would be open to the triumphant Goth. The cracks in the Austrian conglomerate would be cemented by the prestige of a resounding victory. The war party in Italy would be discredited by the catastrophe it had brought on their country. The peace party in Italy would emerge from its hidden fastnesses and perhaps succeed in persuading the victorious enemy to grant, and their defeated countrymen to accept, moderate terms of peace; and thus Italy would be beached on the strand where lay the wrecks of Russia, Roumania, Belgium and Serbia. Austria, with all four enemies on her frontier broken, would be free to assist Germany to overcome the last two resisting elements of the Great Alliance which once threatened to overwhelm the Central Powers.

with their incalculable resources of men and material. If Italy fell out, then, of the six powers that once confronted Germany, Austria and Turkey, there would remain only France and Britain. America would not count for much for at least another eight or nine months. For the first time the overwhelming advantage in numbers would have been on the side of the Central Powers and their artillery preponderance would be emphasised. It was a shrewd blow well timed, and if expeditiously, resolutely and skilfully exploited, calculated to bring final victory to the Teuton. I decided that the situation was so grave that it was desirable that not only the Chiefs of the French and British Staffs, but the French Premier and myself should hurry off to Italy, to concert measures with the Italian Government for co-operation between the Allied Armies to restore the position.

There were two elements, both of them to a certain extent incalculable, upon which the turn of events largely depended. One was the quality of the Italian leadership, civil as well as military. On the military side the Generals in supreme command, General Cadorna and his Staff, were good officers of the kind to which recent years had accustomed us (with one notable exception) on the Allied side. They were highly trained, conscientious, courageous soldiers of average intelligence, but devoid of all the attributes of genius, imagination, originality of conception or fertility of resource, and quite unequal to the calls of a great emergency. When regulation plans carefully devised according to Staff College precepts were smashed in by an unforeseen irruption, they had no gift or initiative for improvisation to set up a new front which would prove more baffling than the old. Two or three Italian Generals on this occasion displayed conspicuous gifts of leadership, and their generalship and the confidence it inspired in the troops along their own fragments of the front helped to arrest the panic. But the Higher Command was overwhelmed by the catastrophe. All the accounts I received alike from Sir William Robertson, Sir Henry Wilson and from French sources gave me a picture of a Staff suffering from the mental concussion of a great shock, issuing bewildering orders to units of whose whereabouts they were in complete ignorance and as to the very existence of some of which they entertained doubts. When I reached Italy these were the reports brought to me by British officers. Divisions had dissolved into fugitive atoms swept by the storm like dust over the plains of Lombardy. How many divisions were destroyed and how many survived and which were the divisions which belonged to one or other of these two categories, no one could tell with any precision or certainty. There were divisions without artillery or baggage still holding together, as it were, by bits of string. Which? Who could tell? Not the Italian General Staff. Then there were two divisions somewhere on the critical front. Where were they? The last one heard of them was that they were fighting



gallantly against great odds in the Alpine foothills. Were they still fighting or had they also been overpowered? It was no use asking the Italian General Staff. They had no information on the subject. I am simply condensing the reports I received from reliable British and French officers, and subsequently confirmed by Sir Henry Wilson, of the dismay and disorder which followed Caporetto. General Cadorna was an able soldier, but of his Chief of Staff, General Porro, I formed a poor opinion. To this aspect of the question I will revert when I come to the meeting at Rapallo. These men proved quite unequal to the facing of a great and sudden crisis. This constituted one of the danger points of an already dangerous situation. In a crisis inadequate men convert peril into catastrophe. They constitute a peril in themselves.

There was a still more incalculable element to reckon with. How would the Italian Army and the Italian people face this unexpected disaster? As to their courage there could be no doubt. The Italian people had entered boldly into a doubtful war at a moment of exceptional doubt in its varying fortunes. They had supported losses, burdens and privations of unexampled magnitude with calm and fortitude. But they had the brilliant achievements of their army to sustain them. They were inspired to fresh efforts by some of the exploits in which their soldiers were wresting from their ancient foes fortresses hewn out of the towering and snow-clad rocks which sheltered their frontiers. But now came the sudden shattering of high hopes, and the armies victorious in many battles for two years were hurled back into the plains, leaving cannon and equipment which had cost the poor Italian peasants so dear, in the hands of an enemy they had thought beaten beyond apprehension. Italy had always a more potent peace party than France or Britain. It was led by Italy's wiliest and most formidable statesman, the veteran Giolitti. The higher priesthood of the Catholic Church was never friendly to the War. Would Italian zeal for the War survive a great defeat?

Then what about the Army? No one has ever cast a doubt on the bravery of the Italian soldier. Should a doubt exist, let him visit Italian battlefields and the last remnant of his scepticism will be shamed out of his heart. No one but brave men, and supremely brave men, could have stormed these gigantic fastnesses in the teeth of Austrian cannon and Austrian rifles, and at the weary end of the perilous climb, Austrian bayonets, wielded by courageous and trained soldiers, well led by competent Generals. Napoleon, explaining the rout of his picked veterans at Waterloo, said there was a moment when panic was apt to grip the most seasoned troops and then they became a rabble. No one doubts the courage of French, British, Russian, Austrian or German troops. The world has never yet nourished more courageous races than those engaged in this horrible

war, and yet at one time or another they have all turned and fled from the battlefield with a victorious army in pursuit picking up their abandoned wounded, artillery and equipment and sweeping up hordes of beaten men who preferred exile in foreign cages to further resistance.

But the dangers of a retreat are not so great amongst the stolid races of the North as in the armies of a quick, imaginative, susceptible people such as the Italians. Panic is fed more by fear than by fact, and fear is fed through the channels of the imagination. Let us put ourselves in the plight of the sensitive and imaginative Italian soldier at and after Caporetto. To him the German warrior was a creature of report. The Germans had not hitherto appeared on the Italian Front and the Italian soldier knew nothing of his measure as a fighter. The Austrian he knew. He had faced and beaten him at many points. There was no mystery left about him. It had been probed by Italian bayonets and its quality inspired no dread. All he knew about the German was that he had overrun Belgium in a fortnight; that he had conquered the richest provinces of France, driving the great army of France and the picked troops of England pell-mell almost to the gates of Paris; that the combined efforts of England and France with a stupendous armament had failed to tear the captured land free from the bloodstained claws and that the unavailing effort to do so had cost the assailants millions of dead and wounded; that, whilst Germany was doing all this with her right arm, with her left she had smashed Russia, Roumania, and Serbia. Having accomplished their destruction, she was now sending her triumphant legions down to the Italian valleys against an army with not one-tenth the equipment of the British or French. No wonder the stoutest Italian soldier felt a shiver of apprehension. The arrows of fear would have quivered in the bravest heart under the same conditions. The Italian Army only knew from report, and report always exaggerates, and the quick Italian fancy worked on these legends. Had the first onset been resisted, all would have gone well, and Italian courage would have been doubly reinforced by the knowledge that it was quite equal to Teutonic efficiency. But Caporetto went wrong. The reports were proved to be true. The Goth was invincible. So that when I went to Italy at the beginning of November, I found soldiers without their rifles who had fled hundreds of miles from the battlefields. Such is the effect of panic on the sturdiest soldiery—for these were the same men who had fearlessly stormed the steep heights of Monte Cristallo, bristling with Austrian guns and rifles, and inch by inch had driven the Austrians out of the rockhewn trenches of the Carso.

The Italian Army had lost heavily in men, and its equipment was seriously impoverished, but it had reserves of men sufficient to fill all gaps and the Allies had the means to re-equip the Italian Army

and to spare. All, therefore, depended on stopping the panic, ere it became too late to arrest the process or achieve any substantial results by doing so. It was in the achievement of this object that France and Britain could render the most immediate and effective service. Obviously the most useful means of restoring morale was to pour at once into Italy contingents of the troops that had held up the redoubtable German and even beaten him out of superbly constructed trenches for three years in France and Flanders. It is no disparagement of Italian courage to say that they were heartened by the sight and comradeship of the men who held Verdun for months against the most intense hail of high-explosive shell that was ever concentrated on any battle area, and of the men who held the narrow Ypres salient for years against the most protracted bombardment to which any fortress has ever been subjected; the men who, on the Somme, the Chemin des Dames and Passchendaele had walked through the terrible hailstorm of the German machine-guns in order to come to a deadly grip with those very Germans, were now pouring across the passes to reinforce the Italian Army.

As soon as the news of Caporetto was brought to me by Sir William Robertson I suggested that he should immediately arrange to send the necessary assistance. He demurred at first, but under pressure afterwards communicated with the French and Italian Staffs in order to put into operation without delay the plans which had been carefully prepared in anticipation of this event. They worked without a hitch. The Rome Conference saved Italy.

On my suggestion, Sir William Robertson proceeded at once to Italy to place himself in communication with the Italian Staff and ascertain from them what further assistance they required from us. In order to enhance further the impression that the Allies were behind the Italians, and that they did not stand alone in their trouble, I suggested to M. Painlevé, the French Premier, that we should both go to the Italian Front and invite the Italian Premier to meet us there. I certainly attached no exaggerated importance to our presence on the spot, but where the object was above all to re-establish morale and to reinforce the national will for continuing the War, every gesture of friendship and comradeship had its effect in promoting that restoration of confidence which is the best antidote for panic. I decided to take General Smuts with me, also Sir Henry Wilson.

My intention was to leave General Wilson at the Italian Headquarters to keep in touch with the Italian Commander-in-Chief and ascertain from him what further co-operation or help was needed, and to keep us informed generally on the situation. M. Painlevé readily concurred in my suggestion that we should visit the Italian Front. As the result of a communication addressed to the Italian Government we were informed that Signor Orlando and Baron Sonnino



would meet us at Rapallo to confer on the situation. M. Franklin Bouillon, who was the most strenuous vocal member of M. Painlevé's Cabinet, accompanied him. General Foch had already left with Sir William Robertson and they were both already in contact with General Cadorna. During our halt at Modane, trainload after trainload of French guns and of cheerful French soldiers passed through on their way to meet the foe on battlefields where their ancestors had won undying fame. Frenchmen had fought and worsted the Austrians in many notable campaigns under the sunny skies of Italy and they took no account of the fact that their old adversaries were now reinforced by still older foes from the Rhineland. Three years' hard fighting had given them the measure of German prowess and they were not afraid to meet on the Piave the soldiers they had fought with success on the Marne and the Meuse. I never saw a more joyous crowd of young men hurrying to meet danger. The sulky depression that followed the Chemin des Dames had completely passed away. As we climbed the steep pass that led to the Mont Cenis tunnel we caught glimpses of a road thronged with French *camions* loaded with materials of war, and when we emerged from the tunnel there were still miles of lorries trailing along towards the plains of Lombardy. The plan was working well. What a contrast was presented by those tranquil valleys blazing with the tints of autumn and the endless procession of waggons carrying material charged with death and mutilation that wended their way under the shadow of the hills! After we passed Turin we came upon the British troops that had arrived by way of the deserted Riviera to join hands with the French expeditionary force that was pouring through the Alps. The British soldiers were happy to exchange the sodden fields of Flanders for the smiling valleys of Lombardy. Their delight was written on their rugged and good-tempered faces. As we saw them we knew in our hearts that the danger of a complete debacle was over. The Austrians were no match for these British and French veterans and the Germans were not numerous enough to make the difference.

Whatever the disorder in the Italian Army—and as yet we were not in a position to judge its full extent—we felt confident that the combined divisions of France and Britain could hold up the German invading force and we were hopeful that the unbroken divisions of the Italian Army could arrest the Austrian advance until the combined Allied forces could be reorganised into an invincible army. In this respect we had some faith in Austrian dilatoriness.

That was our first sketchy impression of the situation after crossing the Alps and viewing the successful development of our relief plans. At every wayside station we witnessed dejected fragments of the shattered Italian divisions, many without rifles. This gave us some idea of the extent of the defeat and of the demoralisation that had

followed defeat. But we were reassured by accounts we received of the Duke of Aosta's army and of the forces under the command of General Diaz.

One little episode brought vividly to our minds the vastness of this war. Before we left Genoa, the wooden shutters were clamped down on the sea side of our railway carriages to shut out the light lest we provide a target for stray German submarines cruising in the Mediterranean off that coast. The following day, we witnessed a spectacle that filled us with pride, a convoy of British tramps steaming in perfect order under the protection of a couple of British destroyers. It was a faultlessly marshalled answer to scoffing admirals who ridiculed the notion of tramps keeping station.

At Rapallo, where we arrived on 4th November, we met Signor Orlando and Baron Sonnino, and we were to judge the value of the civilian leadership enjoyed by Italy in her testing hour. They were seriously disturbed by the gravity of the position, but they were both men of undoubted courage, and never have they displayed that courage more conspicuously than at this crisis in their country's fate. Baron Sonnino was more responsible than any individual Italian statesman for bringing his country into the War and disaster meant for him the eternal reproach of having led Italy to her ruin. He must have realised all that as he entered the conference chamber at Rapallo. Nevertheless, I found him as resolute as ever to fight to the end the issue he had forced by his personality. Never a word of surrender or of compromise did this dour and unbending diplomat utter. I discovered at the Rome Conference that he was entirely destitute of the war mind. His whole thought was centred in the aims and manœuvres of the diplomat. He had no understanding of war, its requirements, appliances or necessities. He left these entirely to others. He disliked being forced to apply his mind to this branch of the problem. In this respect he was a man after the professional soldier's own heart. They could not have invented a more ideal statesman. He was unhappy because the generals in whom he had placed implicit trust had failed him. At the Rapallo Conference he therefore seemed to look for guidance on the war situation entirely to others who had devoted more time and thought to its study. His sole concern seemed to be that the fight should continue and the position be restored with that purpose in view. I found Signor Orlando equally resolved that the fight should go on. Italian G.H.Q. was represented by General Porro, General Cadorna's Chief of Staff. I knew nothing of his qualifications as a soldier but he made the poorest impression on every mind at that conference. He presented a very inadequate account of the situation. He seemed to be ignorant of the most salient facts of the rout. He could tell us nothing that would enable us to form any true estimate of the military position of the Italian Army. He was the most unhelpful ingredient

in that conference except in so far as his futility gave us at least one important clue to the disaster. He seemed to lack knowledge, energy and zeal for the discharge of his important duties and when we saw and heard him we were not in the least surprised at the report given us by General Foch and Sir William Robertson of the chaos and confusion at Italian Headquarters.

It was obvious that the first step to be taken in order to restore confidence was to make a complete change in the Supreme Command. Apart from its patent shortcomings, the Army had lost confidence in it. This change we urged on Signor Orlando and Baron Sonnino and they agreed that it was inevitable. The appointment of a successor to General Cadorna presented great difficulties. The most popular appointment in the Italian Army would have been the Duke of Aosta, who had the reputation of being a fine soldier. He commanded the confidence and had won the enthusiasm and affection of the whole Army. Unfortunately, there were insuperable difficulties of a dynastic kind in the way of his appointment and it became clear that the only alternative was General Diaz. He had done well throughout the War and had acquitted himself with great credit during these last critical days.

A few notes made at the time will afford some idea of the course of the discussion and of its atmosphere.

At the conference on 5th November, General Foch reported that the 2nd Italian Army was absolutely broken, but the 1st, 3rd and 4th Armies remained intact. It was subsequently reported by Signor Orlando that the 2nd Italian Army was the most important of their four Armies, and that a panic had been spread throughout the whole of this Army, only 24 battalions remaining in proper military order. The gravity of the event, therefore, could not be dissembled. General Foch proceeded to report that the Armies still numbered some 700,000 men and ought easily to be able to hold the shorter line of the Piave. The necessary condition, however, was that the Higher Command should be capable of issuing proper orders to the subordinate commanders. His impression was that the Higher Command was at present characterised by inertia. Orders were given, but no one saw that they were carried out. In fact there was practically no Higher Command.

Signor Orlando, on behalf of the Italian Government, took an even graver view of the situation. He considered that the line of the Piave was a good line of defence except at one point, but in the present state of the 2nd Italian Army the other Italian Armies were hardly sufficient to defend this line. There were two perils which had to be faced:—

(1) The possibility of an attack in force in the Trentino, which would probably be made with increased German forces. The



Italian troops now guarding the Trentino were not sufficient to resist this attack.

(2) The Italian Army was only just sufficient to defend the line of the Piave, and there remained no general reserve wherewith to support the shock of an attack on any other point.

Therefore, the help of the Allies, if it was to be effective, must not be less than 15 divisions, which should be transported as rapidly as possible, and should be concentrated in positions where they could be moved to the various threatened points. If the military support of the Allies were given in these conditions of number, distribution and quantity, the Italian Government was convinced that it could meet the situation so far as was humanly possible. If, on the contrary, these conditions were not fulfilled, all the indications were in the opposite direction. Then it would not be possible to maintain the line of the Piave, and it would be necessary to retire. This would be a military disaster, and the political consequences would be of the gravest character. At the present moment the country was calm; it had resigned itself to the loss of territory and had discounted the retreat to the Piave. For the present, the Italian Government could guarantee internal order, unless the line of the Piave was abandoned. Hence the future of Italy depended upon the decision which the Allies took now. The Italian Government asked the Allies to consider that, in order to save the situation, it was not sufficient merely to render some assistance, but essential that that assistance should be adequate.

I said that I agreed with Signor Orlando that the Allies were bound to do all in their power to assist their ally, Italy, in her difficulties. It was not merely that we had passed our word of honour to do so, but that it was the obvious interest of Britain and France to do all in their power to keep Italy in the War, even though her strength was employed more against Austria than against Germany.

Signor Orlando interpolated at this point with quivering passion that this was what Italy intended to do at any cost, even at the expense of retirement to Sicily. (He is a Sicilian.)

To this I replied that there were certain considerations which must be carefully weighed before our decision was taken, and I thought it necessary that we should talk frankly to each other. It was the common interest of all three peoples that we were fighting for. If Germany and Austria were to triumph, Europe would be a very different place from what it was at present. We were fighting for freedom, and hence we were bound to put all our resources into the common stock. France had already sent out four of her very best divisions, most of which were already in Italy. We also were sending two of our best divisions. We intended to send two more divisions, which would make a total of eight British and French divisions in as

short a time as the railways would permit their transport. I laid stress on the fact that these eight divisions were about the best in the British and French Armies. When General Robertson had come to me I had asked him to select thoroughly reliable divisions, and the choice had been made on that basis.

I then came to the consideration of the conditions under which alone it was possible for us to render assistance. It was useless to pour troops into Italy unless we were assured of efficient leadership, that is to say efficient leadership of the Italian Army. Otherwise, the British and French divisions might find themselves left in the lurch. A great disaster might then occur which would destroy not only the Italian Army but the best British and French divisions. I felt convinced from inquiries I had made that at present the leadership of the Italian Armies was not such as to justify us in entrusting to it the British and French divisions. On that point I felt it necessary to speak with great frankness. The Italian Prime Minister had said that part of the Italian Army had been seized with panic, and that history had shown that this was no reflection on their bravery. I reminded Signor Orlando that Napoleon at St. Helena had said that this might happen to the very best troops, and that then nothing could stop them. The Italian Army needed no defence of its valour. During the last few years it had shown itself equal to any troops in the world in gallantry and in confronting dangers of all kinds. Therefore, there was no question of any reflection on brave men. But I had to say frankly that there was some doubt of the capacity of the Higher Direction. I believed that brave men had been led to their doom through lack of proper organisation and staff work. In saying this, I was not talking at random, but on the high authority of Generals Foch and Robertson, and these great generals were the last men in the world to say such a thing unless they felt bound to. There was a *camaraderie* among officers that prevented their saying such things, especially to politicians, except in great urgency. All the information we had showed that leadership and command were lacking in the Italian Army. Exception had been made in the case of the Duc d'Aosta, who was understood to have directed the movements of his army with coolness and capacity. Our information, however, was that the General Headquarters had been in a worse panic than the troops, and had lost control of the situation. When we sent troops we should be glad to entrust them to the gallantry of the Italian Army, and in that respect our confidence was not in the slightest degree impaired by recent events; but frankly speaking we could not trust them to the present High Command.

M. Painlevé assented fully to the statement which I made. After referring to the fact that the French nation, after the Battle of Charleroi, had also experienced some sombre days, but after the retreat had known the glorious days of the Marne, he said that the

triple army which was about to oppose the invaders of Italy must not fail for lack of good command. The check would have terrible and considerable reaction on the three countries. He urged therefore that it was necessary to have a specially good and reliable command.

Both Signor Orlando and Baron Sonnino pressed hard for a promise of 15 British and French divisions. General Porro urged that the Germans and Austrians together had a total of 811 battalions, whereas the Italians had only 377 battalions in all with which to resist this overwhelming force. General Foch scouted these estimates and treated them as a ridiculous exaggeration, as they ultimately turned out to be. The fact that such an estimate had been put forward was only a further proof of the panic which had seized the General Staff. Our military advisers were of opinion that eight divisions would suffice, especially as they were eight of the best quality, provided that the High Command were changed and the Staff reorganised. Later in the course of the day the Italian Prime Minister acceded to this suggestion.

We then proceeded to discuss the general question of a closer co-operation and greater unity of strategy and action between the Allied Armies. These discussions and the decisions we came to will be set forth in detail in the chapter on the Versailles Council and Unity of Command. It was then arranged to proceed to the Italian Front to meet the Italian King and to renew the discussion with him. Progress was very slow as we neared the front and we passed trainloads of civilians and refugees flying from the invaded districts. It was a rainy day and dismal at that. The weather, the report from the front, the groups of runaway soldiers from the 2nd Army who had thrown away their arms to accelerate their flight, the huddled refugees in the railway carriages, and on the platforms, old men, women and children frightened and tearful at leaving their homes—all conspired to produce an atmosphere of terror and dejection. We had to wait at Brescia for some time to enable trainloads of French guns and gunners to pass through to the front. When we reached Peschiera we were taken to a gloomy-looking building under the shadow of the old Austrian fortress of the Quadrilateral. Upstairs we met the King of Italy. Physically he is not a commanding figure but I was impressed by the calm fortitude he showed on an occasion when his country and his throne were in jeopardy. He exhibited no signs of fear or depression. His sole anxiety seemed to be to remove any impression that his Army had run away. He was full of excuses but not of apologies for this retreat; so much so that General Foch showed signs of impatience. This became manifest in the grunting protests from him which were intelligible to those who knew him well.

The record of the proceedings at our Conference at Peschiera on



8th November, is so full of historical interest that it is worth while reproducing the *procès-verbal* of the discussions: —

The King of Italy, at the outset, expressed his great regret that the advice of Mr. Lloyd George had not been followed and that the Allies had not made use of the Italian campaign to crush Austrian resistance. He had fully shared the view of Mr. Lloyd George and regretted deeply that, whereas a few months ago Austria was on the point of breaking down, she had had the opportunity, with German assistance, of turning the tables on Italy.

Mr. Lloyd George regretted that His Majesty was not present at the Rome Conference, where he had strongly urged his views in favour of a combined move on the Italian Front.

The King of Italy agreed with Mr. Lloyd George's remarks, and added that he did not always have the opportunity of having his own views carried out. The King then went on to give an account from his personal observation of the breakdown of the Italian Army under the combined Austro-German attack. The main causes of the Italian failure he attributed to: —

(a) A very thick fog which prevailed on the day of the attack on the northern flank of the Italian Army, and which made the use of the artillery impossible.

(b) The absence of highly trained professional officers who could properly manœuvre the Army when the retreat commenced.

He said that the Italian Army had lost approximately 30,000 officers during the War, and that the younger officers had not been properly trained and could not handle their men under the difficult conditions which arose with the retreat. The men again were also insufficiently trained, and were really only fit to hold trenches and to make a simple advance. They had not been sufficiently instructed to manœuvre for purposes of retreat, and when the retreat took place it soon degenerated into confusion. He had observed the same experience with the Austrian Armies. As soon as the Italians had broken through the Austrian line in their recent advance, the Austrian soldiers, who were also inadequately trained, could not conduct a proper retreat, and fell a prey to the advancing Italian Army. He thought that undue importance had been attached to the extent to which the pacifist movement had progressed in the Italian Army. No doubt a certain amount of mischief in isolated cases had been done by the preaching of priests, and to a smaller extent by the influence of Socialists; but on the whole he did not think that the Italian morale had been seriously undermined by these influences. He attributed more importance to the effects of the duration of the War, which made the men tired and depressed, and he remarked that it was generally

observed that men who came back from leave were depressed and disheartened by the state in which they had found their families and their small affairs. Although charges of treachery had also been made, not a single case had been proved, and he was convinced that the Italian Army had not been successfully tampered with by the enemy.

With regard to the retreat itself, he said that the retirement of the 3rd Army had been quite successfully conducted, and that even the very large number of wounded of this Army had been successfully evacuated during the retreat. The 2nd Army had largely broken up in the retreat, but hundreds of thousands of men had been collected in the rear, and would again be organised into proper units as soon as possible. He did not think that the morale of the men had been very seriously affected by the retreat, and he spoke from personal observation of these men during their retirement.

With regard to the three divisions that were further north in the Cadore, one had successfully retreated, but two had not been heard of for some days, and it was still uncertain whether they had been cut off by the enemy, or whether they were retreating successfully through the foot-hills of the Alps in a westerly direction.

With regard to the future: the King thought that the Piave line could certainly be held; 400 siege-guns and other heavy guns were already mounted on the right bank, as well as 600 field-guns. Trenches were being made and the embankments of the river also afforded excellent cover. If this line was not held, the situation would become serious, not only because Venice would be lost—and that in itself was a serious matter—but because the loss of Venice would mean the retreat of the Italian Fleet to Brindisi and Taranto, as there was no suitable base further north on the Italian coast. With the Austrian Fleet and submarines dominating the Adriatic, the naval position would become very much worse. Therefore, in his opinion, every effort should be made to hold the Piave line. The real danger to this line, in his opinion, was in the north along the head waters of the Piave River, to which the German forces on the right flank of the Austrian Army were rapidly pressing forward. Should the Germans succeed in crossing the Piave higher up and seize Monte Grappa between Asiago and the Piave River, the position along the Piave would be turned, and a further retreat might become necessary. Monte Grappa was now being occupied, and everything was being done to check the rapidity of the German advance, but there was no doubt that grave danger was threatening on that sector.

Mr. Lloyd George then spoke very strongly about the state of the Italian High Command. He said the accounts which had reached the British and French Governments were such as to make

them press strongly for a complete change. They were all the more entitled to make these representations, not only in the interest of the Italian Army itself, but of the British and French Armies, which were now appearing in Italy, and which would come under the supreme direction of the Italian High Command.

The King of Italy replied that, although he did not in every respect agree with the criticisms which had been made against General Cadorna, yet he thought that great weight should be attached to the representation that had been made, and his Government had already decided to remove General Cadorna from the command, and to appoint in his place General Diaz, who, although a comparatively junior officer, had been on the General Staff both before and since the War, and was generally recognised as the brains of the Italian Army and a profound student of the science of war. He himself (the King of Italy) had very great confidence in General Diaz, who certainly would be his own choice from among the officers of the Italian Army. To strengthen the Staff still further, the Government had decided to appoint General Giardino, the former Minister of War, as assistant to General Diaz. General Giardino was stated to be a man of great executive energy and would usefully supplement the work of General Diaz.

Mr. Lloyd George explained, with reference to the situation on the Piave and Trentino Fronts, that the British and French Governments and military advisers were not certain that the best use was being made of the four French divisions in moving them west of Lake Garda along the Val Giudicaria, especially in view of the considerations already referred to by His Majesty that the real danger was threatening between the Asiago Plateau and the Upper Piave. Both the British and French Government were therefore agreed, in view of the great urgency of the situation, that complete discretion should be given to Generals Wilson and Foch to move the six Allied divisions now in Italy to sectors of the Italian Front where they thought the best use could be made of them.

It was agreed that: —

Generals Wilson and Foch should proceed forthwith, with Signor Bissolati, to the Italian headquarters at Padua, and there consult with General Diaz on the military situation, and thereafter move the six Allied divisions to the points of greatest danger on the Italian Front without further reference for instructions to their Governments. They were, however, requested to consult with the British and French general officers commanding these divisions.

(At this stage Generals Robertson, Foch and Wilson were called to the Conference and the above instructions explained to them.)



The King of Italy appeared cheerful throughout the Conference and said that he would do his best to continue working for victory for the Allied cause. He felt that more might have been made of the Italian campaign, and now more than ever he thought that the Italian campaign might assume very large and important proportions in the immediate future, and he expressed his great pleasure and gratitude that his British and French Allies were prepared to support the Italian Armies to the full in the phases of the campaign which were now opening.

We were not free from anxiety when we left Italy. Would the line of the Piave hold? Could it be turned by an attack from the Asiago, the great rocky spearhead that threatened the brain of industrial Italy and might at any moment be driven into it if skilfully wielded by Teutonic craft. This would have been a formidable move and if successful would have laid Milan and Northern Italy prostrate at the feet of the victor, but we felt we had done all we could to avert this disaster. As we left, the French were hurrying through Brescia to face any attack from the Asiago bastion. The snows were later than usual in falling on the hills, but soon they must come and any advance from that direction would be blocked. Throughout Italy that week there were millions of earnest prayers for the coming of the autumnal snows. The British were hurrying up as fast as Italian trains would bring them to take their positions on the Upper Piave and for some reason the Austro-German advance was tarrying. The knowledge that help had arrived was spreading far and wide. It heartened the Italians. It induced more caution in their enemies, for they knew that they had no longer to reckon with a broken and dispirited foe, but with a section of the Italian Army that had never faltered and was now supported by veteran divisions from the terrible battlefields of the North. We were hopeful that the great irruption had been stemmed. We soon knew that our hopes were well founded. Preparations made as a result of the Rome Conference had foiled the German blow. On my return to Paris I met General Plumer, who was on his way to Italy to take command of the British Expeditionary Force. He did not conceal his satisfaction at the prospect of exchanging the Flemish swamp where he had been fighting a characteristically stubborn battle for the more genial surroundings of his new command. His delight, I felt certain, was not prompted merely by climatic reasons. He had no responsibility for initiating the campaign in Flanders and it was quite evident that his heart was not in it. In Italy he won the respect and goodwill of all with whom he came in contact, and justified to the full the reputation he had already won as one of the best soldiers in the British Army.

## CHAPTER LXVII

### THE UNITED FRONT:

### THE INTER-ALLIED COUNCIL

REVIEWING the campaign of 1917 on land, I realised that it was, on the whole, such as the military staffs in London and France had ordained it to be. The Government succeeded in forcing on the Admirals their ideas as to the best methods of fighting the enemy at sea. Had they not overruled the Sea Lords the submarines would have won, and the Allies would have been beaten. On land the High Command had its way. As far as the general strategy of the land fighting was concerned it was their policy. The only exception was the campaign in Palestine which they deprecated. The difference between the Nivelle and Joffre offensive schemes was tactical. But the principle had not been changed. It was that of hammering on the strongest bastion in the enemy's fortress, hurling millions of shells and hundreds of thousands of men at this formidable stronghold whilst the weakest parts of the enemy's ramparts were neglected. In it there was "neither device nor wisdom."

Whenever I invited an examination by the C.I.G.S. or Haig of methods for getting at the enemy on his weakest rather than on his strongest side, I was put off with military axioms about "the decisive front," and engaging your principal enemy on that front. My experiences of this war, and may I also say, of politics, encourage me to venture on another axiom—you should never do what your leading foes would like best to see you expend your energies upon. To concentrate almost exclusively on the Western Front, where your enemy had exercised his utmost engineering skill to construct formidable entrenchments, where the transport system behind was perfect, where he had more cannon and machine-guns than we had, and where consequently we lost three men in fruitless attack for every two he lost in successful defence—suited the foe. On the other hand, the neglect to equip Russia, which ultimately deprived us of the support of millions of first-class fighting men—the failure to exploit the Balkan opportunity for organising a great federation which could attack Austria on her weakest frontier and cut Turkey off from her sources of supplies—all that was just what the Germans would have

wished us to do. And we did it every time and all the time. When the Generals were forced by Governments to attempt other methods like the Dardanelles and Gallipoli, they did it so half-heartedly as to make failure a certainty. They dispatched just enough men and material just late enough to make these side-shows a drain on our resources without giving them a chance of achieving justification by results.

As soon as I formed my Ministry, I strove to induce the Allies to reconsider this policy. I was encouraged to think it might be possible to effect a complete change because of Briand's great speech at the Paris Conference on the "one front." Guns, ammunition, even men were to be pooled. I did not realise then that as soon as Briand descended from the rostrum he took no further interest in his speeches. For him speech was the same thing as action. At least his contribution to action ended with his perorations. It was for others to do the rest. If they neglected to do so, he was not to blame. He had done his part and knew he had done it well, better than anyone else possibly could.

When we had our first Inter-Allied Conference in 1917, Briand made it clear that by the "one front" he meant the French Front. He was all for another great offensive on the Western Front and for concentrating the whole French and British strength upon a victory on French soil. In spite of all his oratorical flights about the Allies pooling their resources, he was not ready to spare a single gun for Italy. Nivelle had captivated his fancy and fired his imagination. I had arranged the Rome Conference in order to have an opportunity for persuading the Allies to reconsider the Chantilly programme. But once the programme was settled and all the Allied Staffs had accepted and started working on it, then it was impossible to change it radically without securing the whole-hearted co-operation of all the Governments concerned. Apart from the reluctance to upset plans already worked out with great elaboration and care by the General Staff, there was the insuperable obstacle that any change in the front of concentration would mean that the British and French Staffs on the Western Front would necessarily have to play a secondary part in what might be the final victory. If the Italian Front were chosen, Cadorna must be Commander-in-Chief, and Nivelle and Haig would have to be satisfied either to remain on the defensive in France, or to confine their activities to comparatively minor operations. There would be no triumphant break-through to Laon for one, and no clearing of the Flemish coast for the other. It would be expecting too much of human nature to hope that they would view such a prospect without a sense of disappointment. It would be a bad psychological blunder to imagine that this would not unconsciously influence their judgment. They had greater confidence in the possibilities of French and British troops than in those



of the Italian—that was a natural and commendable patriotic bias. They had also greater faith in their own capabilities as military leaders than in those of Cadorna. That was not conceit but the outcome of that self-confidence, without which no leader can inspire confidence in others. As far as the French were concerned, there was also the dislike of giving to Italy the lead in victory. Whatever the cause, both Nivelle and Haig were utterly opposed to any combined Allied offensive except on their own front. Robertson was on all questions of military policy just Haig's man. On all occasions he said in effect: "I say ditto to Sir Douglas Haig." He never expressed a military opinion which differed from Haig's. Any fundamental change of plans therefore involved overriding the immutable opinion of the military leaders of the two most powerful Allied Armies. That could not be done unless both Governments agreed to do so. Briand and Thomas were zealous Nivellites. So the French Government stood by the Chantilly version, revised and enlarged by Nivelle. What about Italy? If Cadorna and the Italian Government had played up something might and would have been accomplished. If the British Government had decided against the French offensive in favour of an attack on the Italian Front the situation would have been changed. The French *Generalissimo* could not have carried out his plans without the full support of the British Army. Even with it he failed. Without it, he could not even have tried. But an active and zealous initiative on the part of the Italians was a condition precedent to any such change in the strategy of the year. This was not forthcoming. Why? Cadorna had agreed to the Chantilly plans, and he felt he could not go back on them without a breach of faith with his professional comrades. The coolness with which he received the proposal of a combined offensive on the Italian Front was not attributable to strategical doubt. It was prompted by his deference to professional etiquette. Robertson rubbed it into him. He collared him before he ever entered the Conference room and told him he could not go back on his bargain and sell his brother officers to the politicians for his own advantage. Cadorna was a man of sensitive honour. It was a cruel choice—between his bond and his country. Where such gigantic issues were at stake he ought to have resigned rather than sacrifice the chance offered not only to Italy, but to the Alliance, of achieving a victory which might have lead to an honourable peace and saved millions of lives. There was no real dishonour involved in a change of plans. The circumstances were changed completely by the change in the attitude of the British Government and by their offer of material support for an Italian offensive.

Looking back on the events of 1917, I ought to have foreseen that a change of strategy was impossible without a thorough change in our military leadership. With Robertson and Haig, both men of an

abnormally stubborn character, remaining in the commanding position they held, a new policy was not attainable. No policy can be worked effectively through reluctant instruments. A general direction may be given, but the entire machinery by which it is to be carried out is in hostile hands. Between direction and execution there is endless scope for manipulating details in a way which baffles every purpose. Both Haig and Robertson working together were adepts at that game. All information came through their hands. It was selected and prepared for our consumption. I have shown how over the preparations for the Passchendaele campaign it was handled in such a way as to guide the Cabinet inevitably to the desired conclusion. Some facts and figures were exaggerated or over-emphasised, others understated or suppressed altogether. The professional conscience is a mystery which defies every ethical system ever yet inaugurated. Historically we know of instances where the most exalted Christian ethics have bowed before the inexorable plea of its agents that the end justifies the means. Both Haig and Robertson were genuinely convinced that victory was only attainable on fronts under their direct control. Every scheme for diverting endeavour elsewhere, in their honest opinion, placed the ultimate triumph in jeopardy and must be thwarted by every device. I had to judge these eminent soldiers as I found them at the end of 1916. They were both able, conscientious and hard-working men who stood high in the esteem of all in their profession. Those who are in charge of a great concern know that there is no more difficult question to solve than the dismissal or retention of men under their command who are competent, upright and experienced, with a thorough knowledge of the details of their business, and working without stint to the best of their ability for the success of the business, but who are obstinately attached to old methods when a change of policy is desirable. If they deliberately disobey an order, then one's course is clear. But if they are clever enough just to avoid that indiscretion, then the question of how to deal with them is the most embarrassing that confronts any business man. It often needs a smash to make a change of personnel practicable without creating a sense of injustice to worthy men. If it is done when the reports that come in from them show that the concern is prospering and beating its rivals, then to the interested public a dismissal of such men at such a moment constitutes a scandal and an outrage which are difficult to explain away. There is a suspicion of personal motives which can only be dispersed by an independent investigation that is in itself a reflection on the capacity and integrity of the management, and involves a full revelation of facts which will undermine confidence and damage the whole business of the firm—maybe irretrievably.

That was the position in which the Cabinet were placed at the end of both the 1916 and the 1917 campaigns. The air throbbed with

the drums of victory beaten lustily in Parliament and Press and on every platform.

The talk about the admiration, trust and affection felt by the men in the trenches for their leaders is utter nonsense. There were no legends of the *Petit Caporal* kind attached to any of the Generals. The soldiers never saw and cheered before a battle an impressive figure on a white horse. They hardly ever caught a glimpse of their Commanders except when a vision of burnished brass flew past in a motor car. That is all they saw of the men who spoke the word that sent them to fight in the drowning mud. To the fighting men they were not even individuals. The men in the trenches never spoke of Haig or Gough. To them these exalted personages were "G.H.Q.," "Fifth Army," or more often "the brass hats." The press messages, when they were read in the lines, were a cause of scoffing merriment. The legend of the men's faith in their leaders only flourished in the warmth and comfort of the home front; it never struck root in the trenches. But I had to deal with opinion behind the lines and carry it with me in every step. That there should be no change in our Commanders was stipulated by an influential contingent of Conservative leaders ere they joined the Government. I ought never to have accepted that condition. It hampered and baffled my plans at every turn.

It was necessary therefore to find some method of altering the war direction which would not involve the shock to public opinion resulting from the abasement of men who had won a larger measure of confidence at home than they had amongst the survivors of the men whom they had driven into the Flemish charnel-house.

We had to remove the fundamental cause of the failures of 1915, 1916, and 1917. What was it? The blind and stupid refusal to accept the principle of the single front. Theoretically and rhetorically the united front was boomed, in practice it was ignored. Each G.H.Q. concentrated on its own front. They gave no conscientious or co-ordinated thought to other flanks which were equally important and at a given moment might be more vital to the fortunes of the Alliance. When from another side of the immense battlefield, our Allies sent a cry of despair, then a little assistance was scraped together—always belated. The full platters were for the trenches where they were commanding; for the real need there were only scraps. Russia, France, Britain and Serbia were just Allies, they were not comrades fighting the same battle for a common cause. Joffre, Haig and Cadorna were entitled to say: "We have been entrusted with the conduct of the fight on this particular sector. The business entrusted to us is to beat the enemy in front of us. In order to do so we must secure as many men and as much material as can be spared for our enterprise. It is for the statesmen, with such advice as they can command, to survey the battle area as a whole on



land and sea, to examine the needs and possibilities, to make their plans and to dispose of their resources to the best advantage." That was nominally the position. In practice there was no such distribution of functions. All Governments had their expert military counsellors attached to their War Ministries. But in ability and especially in prestige they were so far inferior to the Commanders-in-Chief of the principal Army in the field that the opinions of the former were ridden down.

In France even Gallieni had not been able to stand up to Joffre. Robertson was terrified of Haig and never dared to utter or mutter a doubt as to his strategy. He himself has admitted that he had serious misgivings about Passchendaele, but not one word of scepticism passed his lips. The first Chief of Staff who was able and influential enough to give independent guidance to his Government, was Foch. But taking the position as a whole, Governments were at the mercy of the Commanders-in-Chief. That is why it came to pass that the War was conducted sectionally. How disastrous were the consequences of this we realised before the end of 1917. The failure to help Russia in 1915 and 1916 with guns, munitions and transport when she had overwhelming reserves of men, ultimately forced her out of the War—crushed, and angry with the allies who refused to equip her brave peasants with the means to defend themselves. The French and British Commanders-in-Chief wanted all the men and material to win victories on their own fronts. It would not be just to say that they were prejudiced even unconsciously by the thought that feathers in Russky's and Brussiloff's hats did not look nearly as well as they did in their own; but they were influenced by the knowledge that their particular job was to beat the Germans in the swamps of Flanders and not in the Pripet Marshes, and they concentrated mind and will on the duties assigned to them. To the same cause may be ascribed the fatal betrayal of Serbia which gave Bulgaria and the Balkans to the Central Powers, saved Austria from the danger of being speared on her most exposed side, revived the military powers of Turkey and prolonged the War by two years, endangering ultimate victory. The Commanders-in-Chief needed all the men and machinery to break through in France, so the greatest chance of the War, being elsewhere, must be neglected. We had the same experience in 1917. An offensive against Austria which would have converted her desire for peace into an urgent necessity, was turned down in favour of colossal attacks in France and Flanders, both of which were colossal fiascos ending in colossal losses. The only Allied military successes of the year 1917 were won in the despised East, where two of the most famous cities of the world, Jerusalem and Baghdad, fell into Allied hands, and the Turkish military façade was smashed in and the hollowness behind exposed. Had this been done in 1915 or 1916, Turkey would have been out of the

War. Access to Russia and the Danube by sea would have been opened and hundreds of thousands of men hitherto locked up in sham fights with the Turk—childish exhibitions of the prod and run-away sort—would have been available for other fronts.

The only operation where the common front had been the basic principle, was the organisation and dispatch of a combined French and British Expeditionary Force to Italy after Caporetto. That had been a decisive success. It redeemed a desperate situation. But the preparations had been suggested and urged by British Ministers at the Rome Conference. The Generals had reluctantly acquiesced.

A mere change in Commanders and War Office advisers would not alter the intrinsic defect which led direct to these failures in Allied strategy. The French had changed their Commanders-in-Chief, but Nivelle was only Joffre writ small. They changed their Chiefs of Staff repeatedly and nothing happened except a change in the signature appended to War Office documents. I came to the conclusion therefore that the removal of Haig and Robertson would not touch the real problem, but there must be a more thorough and essential change in the whole method of conduct of Allied strategy if we were to win. I was of opinion that the only way out of the *impasse* was to set up an authoritative Inter-Allied body which would have its own Staff and its own Intelligence Department who, working together, would review the battlefield as a whole and select the most promising sector for concentrated action. The essential conditions for the efficacious working of such a body would be:—

(1) That whilst it would be necessarily in constant touch with the various G.H.Q.'s it should be entirely independent of their control.

(2) That the experts should be men of unquestioned ability and mastery of their respective professions.

(3) That Ministers should be represented on that body so that they should be consulted on questions of policy whilst plans were being considered. Hitherto the plans of campaign had only been submitted to the Governments after they had been formulated and fashioned and agreed to by the Military Staffs in every detail. It was the Governments alone who could decide such vital questions as the available man-power, shipping, finance, blockade and diplomatic expedients. But hitherto plans had been prepared to the last details without their ever being consulted. No sound plans could be formed by such methods.

(4) Naval experts must also constitute one integral element in the composition of the Inter-Allied Staff. Sea power turned out to be the decisive factor in the end. Up to 1917 there had not even been an Inter-Allied Naval Conference. It is amazing that with a full knowledge of the importance of sea power, statesmen and naval experts had not up to this date been called into effective consultation when campaigns for the coming year were being settled by the

military chiefs. They were consulted when a particular operation was dependent on the active co-operation of the Navy—for instance, Gallipoli and the battle for clearing the Flanders coast. But that was taking much too narrow a view of the vast battle area of the War. The sea front was as essential to victory as the Western or any other front, and it was impossible rightly to judge the wisdom or otherwise of the general campaign without understanding thoroughly how the command of the sea would affect the military situation and especially the economic conditions which determined the equipment and morale of the various belligerents.

Campaigns must therefore be prepared which would take the naval situation into account as an essential element.

These points are admirably elucidated by Sir William Robertson in a paper he submitted to the Cabinet—alas, only at the end of 1917.

“ . . . Further, the question of the Entente outlasting Germany to such an extent as to be able to dictate terms of peace to her is obviously affected by many political, social and economic conditions of the different Entente countries with which I am imperfectly acquainted, and regarding which, indeed, no one can give an accurate forecast. Of no less importance are the naval and shipping situations, as to which also I can express no opinion. It is therefore quite impossible for me to give a definite and comprehensive reply to the question, and I accordingly wish it to be understood that what is said below is not intended to be a complete answer, but to be considered in conjunction with the other numerous considerations of a non-military character.

If we were engaged in a war in which the British Army alone was fighting a single belligerent, and in which considerations other than those of a purely military nature were of little or no account, the General Staff ought to be able to give an opinion with reasonable accuracy. But nothing resembling these conditions obtains in the present stupendous struggle, which is not a war merely of armies, but of some 20 or more nations, and draws into its vortex every branch of national life. *The chief factors about which I am necessarily ignorant* and which prevent me from being more explicit in my replies, are the extent to which the Royal Navy expect to cope with the submarine menace and generally to secure our sea-communications, the shipping position, the rate at which American troops will be put into the field, the staying power of the Entente, and the number of men to be supplied to the British Army during 1918. . . . Nor do I know what personnel the Navy requires, what it has got, how it is employed, what number or class of ships are needed, what are being constructed, what labour is required in the shipyards, and whether it could be further



diluted. Nor do I pretend to know the possibilities of offensive and defensive naval action. . . . I suggest, with every respect and deference, that the allotment and employment of our resources of all kinds merit further investigation. When this has been made it will, I think, be possible for the War Cabinet to reach a safer and clear conclusion as to our prospects of winning the War than they are able to reach from the restricted and indefinite replies I have been compelled to give. . . . Our task is to do our utmost to ensure holding our own until America arrives, and meanwhile make every endeavour to expedite her arrival. . . ."

Why was he "necessarily ignorant" of these vital factors? They were all accessible to him at any time. Up to the present he does not seem to have sought them. He had formed his judgments and advised the Government on strategy, whilst he admits that he "did not pretend" to know, and had not taken the trouble to investigate facts and conditions which were essential to a sound opinion.

The civilian and naval experts who alone could give reliable advice on all these "chief factors" had never been called into Council in the planning of campaigns, the success of which depended on these considerations. The failure of the Chantilly strategy in 1917 convinced me that there must be a fundamental change in the method of settling our military policy.

The real weakness of Allied strategy was that it never existed. Instead of one great war with a united front, there were at least six separate and distinct wars with a separate, distinct and independent strategy for each. There was some pretence at timing the desperate blows with a rough approach to simultaneity. The calendar was the sole foundation of Inter-Allied strategy. Let us each hit as we like, where we choose, and with such weapons as we each have at our disposal—but all hit at the same time. There was no real unity of conception, co-ordination of effort or pooling of resources in such a way as to deal the enemy the hardest knocks at his weakest point. There were so many national armies, each with its own strategy and its own resources to carry it through. Neither in men, guns or ammunition was there any notion of distributing them in such a way as to produce the greatest results with the available resources of the Alliance as a whole. There had been no genuine endeavour to pool brains with a view to surveying the whole vast battlefield and to deciding where and how the most effective blows could be struck at the enemy. Before 1917 no General that mattered in the East had ever met a military leader who counted in the West. The two-day conferences of great generals which were held late each autumn to determine the campaign for the ensuing year, were an elaborate handshaking reunion. They had all of them come to the meeting with their plans in their pockets. There was nothing to

discuss. It was essential that a body should be set up for common thinking for the next campaign.

As soon as I was convinced that it was essential that the future of the War must be subject to advice given by an independent body, organised on these lines, I took steps to sound the Allies on the point. I first of all communicated with President Wilson:—

Dear President Wilson,

“ 3rd September, 1917.

*Views on the Conduct of the War.*

I am taking advantage of the visit of Lord Reading to Washington to lay in front of you certain views about the conduct of the War which I have formed in the light of my experience during the last three years. We are approaching a very difficult period in which it will be necessary to take far-reaching decisions which will be of the utmost importance as regards our future campaign—decisions which will be of vital moment to all the Armies in the field. In arriving at these decisions I think it is essential that the heads of the British and the United States Governments should fully understand one another's views. I avail myself of this method of communication because I do not wish my remarks to have an official character. I am only anxious that you should, as far as that is possible without direct conversation, be in full possession of my views.

First of all as to the general strategy to be followed in the prosecution of the War during the winter of 1917-18 and the spring and summer of 1918. The hard fact which faces us to-day is that in spite of the efforts of the Allies to raise and equip armies and to manufacture munitions, in spite of their superiority in men and material and the perfection to which they have brought their offensive arrangements, the Germans at the end of 1917 as at the end of each of the previous years' campaigns, find themselves in possession of more and not less Allied territory. By the end of 1917 the Allies had confidently expected to have produced very serious inroads on the German military power, even if they did not succeed in overthrowing it altogether. Their failure is, of course, mainly attributable to the military collapse of Russia. It is also true to say that in every other respect, politically and economically, the Germanic combination is far weaker than it has ever been. But I am convinced from my experience of the last three years that *the comparative failure of the Allies in 1917 is also in some measure due to defects in their mutual arrangements for conducting the War.*

As compared with the enemy the fundamental weakness of the Allies is that the direction of their military operations lacks real unity. At a very early stage of the War, Germany established a practically despotic dominion over all her Allies. She not only

reorganised their armies and assumed direction of the military strategy, but she took control also over their economic resources so that the *Central Empires and Turkey to-day are to all intents and purposes a military Empire with one command and one front. The Allies on the other hand have never followed suit.* The direction of the War on their side has remained in the hands of four separate Governments and four separate General Staffs (namely those of France, Great Britain, Italy and Russia) each of which is possessed of complete knowledge only of its own front and its own national resources, and which draws up a plan of campaign which is designed to produce results mainly on its own section of front. The defects of this system have not been lost sight of. From time to time of late with greatly increased frequency there have been International Conferences to discuss the Allied war plans. But up to the present these Conferences have done little more than attempt to synchronise what are in reality four separate plans of campaign. *There has never been an Allied Body which had knowledge of the resources of all the Allies and which could prepare a single co-ordinated plan for utilising those resources in the most decisive manner, and at the most decisive points, looking at the front of the Central Powers as a whole and taking into account their political, economic and diplomatic as well as their military weaknesses.*

*At the forthcoming Conferences, which will assemble as soon as the results of the present offensives have become clear, I shall urge the imperative importance of establishing more effective unity in the Allied strategy.* The policy we have pursued hitherto has been to concentrate all our attacks on Germany on the ground that Germany is the mainspring of the hostile alliance, that it is therefore sound policy to try and knock out her army first, even though it is the strongest with which we are confronted, because if we succeed, all the rest will collapse with it. In consequence, for more than three years, the armies of the main Allies have been engaged each summer in a series of terrific and most costly offensives against the strongest part of the enemy line—offensives which have never yet produced any decisive results in breaking down the enemy military organisation. He still opposes a solid and hitherto impenetrable defence. That we have continued to pursue it so long despite the great changes which have come over the general character of the War, is, I believe, mainly due to the fact that there has been no body in existence on the Allied side which could consider the military problem as a whole regardless of the traditions which have grown up in each army, and of the national prejudices and prepossessions of the several Allies in the use of their forces.

Before committing ourselves to a repetition of these frontal



assaults, I feel that we are bound to study the position, especially with the view of determining whether there is not an alternative plan of campaign. For some time past, it has seemed to me that we ought to consider very carefully whether we cannot achieve decisive results by concentrating first against Germany's allies. In favour of this latter policy it can be urged that the opposing armies are now on parallel lines from one end of every front to the other, and that the War is now practically a siege of the Central Empires, to which must be applied the principles of siege warfare. In a siege you do not seek out the strongest part of the enemy line, but the weakest, in the hope that if you break down the defence there, the position as a whole will be turned. To-day, the weakest part of the enemy line is unquestionably the front of Germany's allies. They are weak not only militarily but politically. They are also very anxious for peace, so that a comparatively small success might produce far-reaching results. Moreover, just inasmuch as their armies have been controlled and their resources organised by Germany as part of the defence of their new Empire of Mittel-Europa, to attack them is to strike at Germany to a far greater extent than was the case in the early days of the War. It is to knock away the props upon which the German military power now increasingly depends. If this were once done, if the inability of the Prussian military machine to defend its allies were thus proved, and the dream of Eastern dominion thus destroyed by the defection of one of these allies, the whole enemy military edifice might fall rapidly in ruins.

There is another aspect of the case. In Northern Europe it is only possible to carry on an intense campaign for six, or at most seven months of the year. It so happens that these winter months are the best campaigning season in South-Eastern Europe and Turkey and Asia. It seems to be doubtful if we have ever made really adequate use of the Allied forces to achieve decisive results in the South-Eastern theatre during the periods when they could not be employed on the main fronts.

I need not go further into the strategical questions at issue. What I have said will be sufficient, I think, to make it clear that if we are to make the best possible use of the forces at the disposal of the Allies, it is of supreme importance to establish effective unity in the direction of the War on the Allied side. If we are to avoid wasted effort and wanton loss of life, those who draw up the plan of campaign must have full knowledge of the resources of all the Allies, not only in men and munitions, but in shipping, railway material, and so forth, so as to determine how they can best be employed against the enemy organisation. *In my opinion it will be necessary to establish some kind of Allied Joint Council, with permanent military and probably naval and economic staffs attached to work*

*out the plans for the Allies, for submission to the several Governments concerned.*

This brings me to the second question to which I would like to draw your attention. It relates to the representation of the United States at the Councils of the Allies. I fully appreciate the objections which the American people feel to being drawn into the complex of European politics. The British people have always attempted to keep themselves aloof from the endless racial and dynastic intrigues which have kept Europe so long in a state of constant ferment, and even to-day their main desire is to effect a settlement which will have the elements of peaceful permanence in itself, and so free them and the rest of the world from the necessity of further interference. These feelings must naturally be far stronger in America. I have not, therefore, the slightest desire that the United States should surrender the freedom of action which they possess at present.

At the same time, there are, in my opinion, very strong reasons why the United States should consider whether they ought not to be represented at the Conferences of the Allies. To begin with, I think the presence of a representative of the United States at the Conference which will determine the future strategy of the War, would be of the utmost value to the Allied cause. I do not say this merely because the decisions will vitally affect the American Army in Europe. I attach great importance to it for this reason. But another reason weighs still more strongly with me. I believe that we are suffering to-day from the grooves and traditions which have grown up during the War, and from the inevitable national prejudices and aspirations which consciously or unconsciously influence the judgment of all the nations of Europe. I believe that the presence at the deliberations of the Allies of independent minds, bringing fresh views, unbiased by previous methods and previous opinions, might be of immense value in helping us to free ourselves from the ruts of the past, and to avoid having our armies drawn into a strategy which is bound to be immensely costly, and which may not be that calculated to give us the best results.

There is another reason. We have now reached a point when it is becoming more and more difficult to maintain, not only the national unity of each of the Allies, but unity among the Allies themselves in the vigorous prosecution of the War. Every nation in Europe is becoming exhausted. The desire for peace in some quarters is becoming almost irresistible. The argument that any kind of peace is better than a continuation of the present suffering and carnage is daily increasing its appeal. At the same time people are beginning to ask themselves whether victory is obtainable at all and this question will be asked with all the greater insistence in a few weeks' time if the end of the campaigning season shows that

the whole campaign of 1917 has made no decisive impression upon the German military position. There is no question that victory is within our power. It may be nearer than any of us can reasonably calculate. But if it is to be obtained, it will only be because the free nations exhibit greater moral unity and greater tenacity in the last desperate days than the servants of autocratic power. The preservation of that moral unity and tenacity will be our principal task during the forthcoming winter, and I believe that it depends more and more upon the British Commonwealth and the United States. This does not mean, of course, that our Allies are not fighting as vigorously and as valiantly as ever. It rather means that for one reason or another they have mobilised their national resources to the utmost point of which they are capable without having overthrown the enemy, and that consciously or unconsciously they rely upon the British and the Americans to supply that additional effort which is necessary in order to make certain of a just, liberal and lasting peace. As you may be aware, the appearance of the vanguard of the American Army has produced a tremendous effect, especially in France. I would ask you to consider, therefore, whether it is not of the utmost importance that the purpose and ideals as well as the wisdom of America should be manifested in the Council Chamber as well as the battlefield if we are to preserve unshaken during this difficult winter season the resolution of the Allies to go on with the War until Prussian military despotism over Germany and her allies is broken, by revolution from within or defeat from without. I recognise, of course, that there are grave difficulties in the way, but I feel that I ought to put in front of you the immense importance to the success of our cause which I believe attaches to the manifestation at the Conferences of the Allies of the determination of America to prosecute the War with her whole strength, and of her confidence in ultimate victory.

In conclusion may I say how much we all here have appreciated the speeches you have made about the War. If you will permit me to say so, I believe that your statements have been not the least important of the contributions which America is making to the cause of human freedom. They have not only been a profound and masterly exposition of the Allied case. They have recalled to many the ideals with which they entered upon the War, and which it is easy to forget amid the horrors of the battlefield and the overtime and fatigue in the munition shops. They have given to the bruised and battered peoples of Europe fresh courage to endure and fresh hope that with all their sufferings they are helping to bring into being a world in which freedom and democracy will be secure, and in which free nations will live together in unity and peace.

Sincerely yours,

D. LLOYD GEORGE."



How President Wilson responded to this appeal will be seen when we come to the action he took to give practical support to the Inter-Allied Council which was set up in November, on the lines indicated in this letter.

Before coming to any final decision as to the course which I should recommend to the Cabinet and to the Allies for the future conduct of the campaign, I invited Sir Douglas Haig's views on the subject. Unfortunately when he dictated his review of the military prospect he was absorbed in the conduct of one of the greatest and most prolonged battles ever fought. In spite of the huge armies engaged on both sides it was fought on a narrow front. He had just captured a small Flemish village and his whole mind was now concentrated on reaching the next hamlet half a kilometre further on. The inevitable visual compression involved in such a task, together with the mental ferment of battle, were not conducive to a broad and calm survey of the stupendous problem of carrying on a struggle in three Continents and over immense seas. You feel that throughout this document his mind is stuck in the mud. He never gets out of it from the first paragraph to the last. His review of a world war is limited by the Passchendaele Ridge a few hundred yards above his front line. That is his horizon. If you storm that, all the rest will be added unto you. Beyond that range of vision you can gallop through easily to a final triumph.

In his appreciation of the military situation, he started with the very obvious proposition:—

“that if the power of resistance of the German Armies were once broken down completely, or even manifestly on the point of breaking down, Germany and her allies would gladly accept such terms of peace as the Allies might offer.”

We now know that all Germany's allies had broken down completely before her own Armies gave in, and accepted the humiliating terms dictated to her. Had Austria, Turkey, and Bulgaria kept on fighting, Germany would not have been the first to surrender, and she certainly would not have submitted to such conditions of peace.

The Haig memorandum then proceeds not so much to review the military prospects, as to justify the continuation of his Flanders offensive.

“The first question to be answered, therefore, is: Are we justified, under the conditions postulated by the Prime Minister, in basing our plans on a belief in the feasibility of overcoming the resistance of the German Armies by direct attack before the endurance of the British Empire, and its Allies remaining in the field, breaks down?

If the answer to that question is in the affirmative, our course is clear. If it be in the negative, the next question is,—what better course is open to us and our Allies?”

He says he will deal, briefly, with the second question first. He does not so much deal with as dispose briefly—very briefly—of all the various alternative courses which were then open to us. He brushes aside scornfully the various plans proposed for gaining “some success against the Turks, or possibly, against the Austrians.” His main argument against them is that “every addition to our strength in the East entails a corresponding weakening of our efforts in the West,” and in another phrase, “my armies might be reduced to the defensive.” Following an example which had been repeatedly set by Sir William Robertson, he uses two quite contradictory arguments. One is that the Germans might follow us to other theatres and check us there. And the other is that the Germans would remain in France and assume the offensive against our weakened forces there. He is alarmed about

“the effect on our Allies (including America), on the peoples of the British Empire, on public opinion throughout the world, and not least in the East, and on the enemy,”

of a cessation

“of offensive operations in the Western Theatre.”

The implication is that if he discontinued his muddy campaign at Passchendaele it would seriously disconcert and depress the Allies. So he dismisses contemptuously—

“the various indirect means which have been suggested to sap Germany's power by operating against her allies.”

He makes the admission that—

“there are conditions under which such indirect action is wise, and offers the best chance of success in war: but those conditions do not obtain for us in this war.”

Therefore there was no alternative but for us to go on with the offensive in front of Ypres, which he assures us “continues to make good progress.”

There are the familiar assurances that—

“the enemy is undoubtedly considerably shaken, and the ground we have already gained gives us considerable advantages and renders

us less dependent on weather in following up our success further. Our troops are elated and confident: those on the enemy's side cannot but be depressed, and we have good evidence of it.

In these circumstances it is beyond question that our offensive must be pursued as long as possible."

The output of optimistic slosh was at this date at its maximum in quantity and quality. The looms of the victory mills were then working overtime at G.H.Q. The radiant fabrics turned out by the Intelligence Factory were dazzling the deluded public who saw nothing of the terrible conditions of the battle.

The Commander-in-Chief was the most important of those who were taken in. This document reveals his condition. I have already exhibited some patterns of the glittering stuff sent across the Channel from the Château of Beauquesne. Here are a few more samples, and as they have a bearing upon the campaign of 1918 I put them down here.

"The considerable wastage imposed on the enemy by a continued offensive" (this he explains will take a few weeks more), "may be expected to leave at the end of the year but a small balance, if any, of the 500,000 men in the reserves he now has available."

That is a fair illustration of the state of morbid exaltation into which Haig had worked himself. Between 8th October and the end of the Passchendaele campaign, he anticipated wiping out nearly 500,000 Germans! He is elevated by his triumph above all comprehension of the grim facts. He ignores completely the fact that he was wasting his own fighting men and reserves at the rate of five to three of the enemy. The German Army would be decimated and enfeebled: the British Army would be stronger than ever. He assures us that the defection of Russia would make no appreciable difference to his chance of success. He bases his confidence on his belief, not only that the enemy reserves would be exhausted, but that the German troops that survived Passchendaele would be such poor material that they could be held in 1918 by mutinous Russians and discouraged French soldiers whilst he continued his smashing offensive up to the final scattering of the tattered remnants of Germany's great army. He takes no account of the immense losses sustained in his own army in picked men and experienced officers, and the exhaustion and resentment created in the survivors by this delirium of unbridled authority which had tortured them almost to the limits of human endurance. His assurance is undimmed by the fact that—

"though the French cannot be expected to admit it officially, we know that the state of their armies, and of the reserve man-power



behind the armies, is such that neither the French Government nor the military authorities will venture to call on their troops for any further great and sustained effort."

He continues: —

"Though they are staunch in defence and will carry out useful local offensives against limited objectives, French armies would not respond to a call for more than that, and the authorities are well aware of it."

Then he adds a sentence which is very ominous of the intoxicated state of his mind, when he protests that the French dare not call on their troops for any such further effort—

"at any rate before it becomes evident that the enemy's strength has been definitely and finally broken."

He was not daunted—

"even though Russia should collapse entirely and despite the weakened state of France and Italy."

As he puts it—

"the British army alone can be made capable of a great offensive effort."

Without any help from crumbling or crouching allies he would before this battle was over have reduced the German Army to a state where they would have their best men put out of action, their reserves destroyed and their spirits broken so that they could easily be disposed of next year by the victorious British Army, rested and replenished with such assistance as the French, the Americans and Portuguese might be able to afford by holding up the Germans on their respective fronts.

There were certain stipulations which, he said, were conditions precedent to this achievement by his Army. The first was that we must take over no more French line. The French troops were good enough to hold trenches, but they were incapable of a great offensive. That must be left to the British, but they must not be wasted in mere defensive tasks. Therefore, if the French pressed us to take over more line, it was—

"necessary to refuse . . . and to adhere resolutely to that refusal, even to the point of answering threats by threats if necessary."

The second stipulation was that we must supply him with all the men, munitions and aeroplanes he asked for. The difficulties we were experiencing at home in finding men to fill the appalling rents caused by the slaughter in Flanders he completely ignored. He must have the men. It was our business to find them. His was only to use them up. The third condition was that he was to have the final say in the strategy of 1918. Such failures as had occurred had been entirely attributable to the fact that we had been overruled in military policy by the French: —

“We must insist upon occupying the predominant position in the Councils of the Allies to which our strength entitled us.”

In fact, the crashing victory of Passchendaele justified us in demanding the military hegemony of the Alliance. French, Americans, Italians and Russians would have to bow to the will of the only victors in the fight.

The concoctions of Haig's Intelligence Staff had clearly gone to his head, and he was therefore not in a state of mind to give us sober advice. We then turned to Sir William Robertson for his views. He was in substantial agreement with the conclusions arrived at by Sir Douglas Haig, although he does not commit himself to the exultant views of the Commander-in-Chief as to the triumphs of Passchendaele. At that time, he was beginning to be troubled with hesitations about the Flanders campaign. He loyally kept them from the Government he served. He only revealed them to the British people years after the disclosure had ceased to be of any service to them or their valiant sons. In his paper reviewing the military position he completely overlooks the great battle that was then raging, as if its outcome would not affect the position either way. He relies rather on accepted common-places such as that—

“no country ever has had, or probably ever will have, sufficient resources to seek a decision in two theatres at the same time.”

“The first rule of all wars is to concentrate in the main theatre all forces that can be supplied. Any departure from this rule has invariably proved to be disastrous.”

I wonder what Grant would have said to this rule when Sherman was sent marching through Georgia in order to turn the Confederate flank!

When there are several theatres a decision ought to be sought where it is most likely to be found. In any war or battle the decisive theatres vary according to fluctuating conditions. It is only the Generals who see the flank on which opportunity has arisen and take it without hesitation that win victories.

Robertson is very bitter about the French: —

“Politics have there largely taken the place of patriotism. French Ministers are thinking mainly of the rear, and not of the front of their Armies—that is, of the pressure likely to be put upon them by Deputies who are interested in releasing this or that class of men from the Armies, and not of the great military problems which face the Entente.”

This is rather hard on a people who had made such tremendous sacrifices and who had called to the Army one out of every seven of the population. He is just as contemptuous about the Americans: —

“The people moreover are beginning to be sceptical of the Americans winning the War.”

Then comes the inevitable conclusion: —

“For the above and many other reasons, it seems to me most unwise to weaken our efforts on the Western Front.”

As to any idea of a campaign in Palestine, he had never been able to regard it as a sound military measure: —

“The right military course to pursue is to act on the defensive in Palestine and the East generally, and to continue to seek a decision in the West. . . . It entails, of course, that all resources should be sent to the West Front, other than those which are absolutely required for the defence of our Eastern positions.”

He is very suspicious about the idea of Unity of Command: —

“The principle of ‘Unity of Command’ and ‘one front’ must be cautiously applied. In theory it is attractive, in practice it has not been encouraging.”

He insists that we should give the Allies a strong military lead. Here he follows Sir Douglas Haig’s hint. Unity of Command must mean that the Commandment must be ours. He then ends with the demand that there should be more men, and he has left us in no doubt that they are wanted to continue the offensive on the one and only front where the altars were adequate to the immensity of the sacrifice.

In order to enlighten the Cabinet on the military position and to test and fortify my own judgment on the action which I was inclined to take, I decided to seek independent expert opinion. I saw that Robertson, if he had views independent of Haig’s opinions, was



stubbornly bent on keeping them to himself, and that he would do nothing to stop throwing our men into the Flemish shambles until Haig was ready to give up. Of that there was no hope until the winter set in. Haig was constitutionally incapable of changing plans he had once prepared and set his mind on carrying through. I therefore followed a precedent set in August, 1914, when Mr. Asquith called into his first War Council not only the Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Forces and the Chief of Staff but other distinguished soldiers like Lord Roberts, Sir Douglas Haig and Sir Henry Wilson. I decided to ask the opinion of Lord French, then commanding the Home Forces, and Sir Henry Wilson. They were invited to attend a meeting of the War Cabinet on 11th October, which was also attended by Sir William Robertson, and asked to give their considered opinion on the military outlook in view especially of the Russian collapse, and also on the best methods of solving our difficulties in the face of that collapse. They naturally asked for time to frame their replies to such grave questions, and they also asked whether the War Office would furnish them with all the information at its disposal which would enable them to form an accurate judgment as to the position. Sir William Robertson promised to see that that was done. Haig had been asked to attend but stated that he had already given his views in writing.

After a thorough examination of the information submitted to them by the War Office, including the document written by Sir Douglas Haig, from which I have quoted, both Lord French and Sir Henry Wilson each submitted a memorandum to the Cabinet on 20th October. These memoranda contain a very elaborate and highly interesting survey of the whole military position. A few extracts will give an idea of their substance. Lord French, in dealing with a statement by Sir Douglas Haig that his attacks in Flanders would have a greater effect upon our prestige in the East than any operations on the Eastern or South-Eastern Fronts, says:—

“Sir Douglas Haig’s estimate of the effect produced upon the minds of ‘the leading men in the East’ by the operations on the Western Front is in my view largely illusory. I do not believe that the people of India or Egypt, or the Middle East generally, or even of the Far East, take such interest in the Western Front. I should say that India is perhaps interested to a limited extent in what has happened internally in Russia, and that it takes a general interest in the welfare of the Allies; but I should also imagine that India and the East took more interest in the capture of Baghdad than in all the battles on the Western Front after the first definite set-back of Germany in September, 1914, which was a thing they could understand. The Mohammedans probably do not look much beyond Turkey. In any case, fighting battles on the Western Front

to impress the East, or even to impress the German people is not a good military reason, and I am sure that with the possible exception of any action which is very far-reaching and decisive, the East will always be far more impressed by what happens at its own doors, in which I include Palestine."

He then proceeds to deal with the Field-Marshal's summary of the position on the Western Front: —

"He draws a vital distinction between 135 divisions which have been 'broken by their losses' and are therefore of low fighting value, and 12 which he presumably considers to be good

On what evidence does he draw this distinction or make this assumption? Have not many of our own divisions at certain points in the line been 'driven from their position, or withdrawn broken by their losses, since April, 1917?' Have not many, if not all of them gone on again and succeeded? And do we not still count all alike as effective units in the line of battle?"

He then casts a doubt upon Sir Douglas's statement about the great wastage suffered by the German Army, and on his estimate that the Germans had suffered 50 per cent. greater casualties than we had. He talks of Sir Douglas Haig's optimism as to the effect produced by his various offensives: —

"Up to a very short time ago Sir Douglas Haig's own utterances in public: his statements to people who interviewed him: his secret messages to the War Cabinet: and his assurances to the troops under his command, all expressed the firm conviction which had complete possession of his mind that he could break the enemy's line in such a manner as to pour large bodies of cavalry through the gap he had made and compel a great German retreat.

As a matter of fact, masses of cavalry were actually brought up to points close behind the trenches, in this hope and expectation."

He summarises in the light of accomplished facts the results which have been achieved by the various offensives: —

"Taking a complete clearance of Northern France and Belgium as the least objective to ensure a military defeat of the German Army, we find that in 15 months' fighting (1st July, 1916, to 1st October, 1917), 200 square miles have been gained out of an area of 13,500 square miles which are directly in front of the British forces.

These results have been attained at a cost of upwards of one million killed, wounded and missing.

The answer will, of course, be: 'We have put a great many more Germans *hors de combat*, and their morale and fighting efficiency have been heavily damaged.'

I submit that there is not sufficient evidence to justify such a conclusion."

As to a paper showing comparative casualties which had been shown to him by the General Staff, and where it was computed that the enemy had lost 255,000 men on the Ypres Front alone between 31st July and 5th October, he says:—

"If this is really so, and the pressure we exert is so enormous, why are they able to embark on their present Russian activities, or form two new divisions for service in Asia Minor, as, we have been informed by the General Staff, they are in process of doing.

Personally, I entertain grave doubts as to whether we have not been playing the German game throughout the whole of our operations in the last year and a half.

It seems to me very possible that they have made the most of the greatly enhanced power of the defensive, amongst which the element of 'deception' is perhaps the most important. It is quite open to question whether they have not deliberately led us on to the capture of ground which is, in the long run, of little military importance to them, and which they know they never want to keep even if they could. It is by no means unlikely that their object throughout has been to hold us on the Western side, and to do so in such a manner as to invite our attack and impose enormous casualties upon us, with a minimum loss to themselves.

This possibility has been strengthened in my mind by numerous conversations I have had from time to time with officers from the front and from other sources."

He then quotes the "rule of war"\* which Sir William Robertson had laid down as a principle which ought to guide the decision of the Cabinet:—

"In Para. 2 he lays down a 'rule' of war, which he says must guide the decision of the War Cabinet, and which furnishes the basis of his subsequent argument."

In regard to this, Lord French says:—

"In some aspects I disagree with the C.I.G.S. The immense line held by the Allies from the Persian Gulf to the North Sea embraces several alternative theatres of war; and whilst it may be right to say

\* See extract from Sir W. Robertson's Memo., p. 1423.



that all our energies should be concentrated on *one at a time*, it does not by any means follow that the principal theatre should be always the same. This is particularly so when climatic conditions favour operations in one theatre, while they absolutely preclude them in another.

The history of Napoleon's campaigns affords many examples of this.

It appears to me that Sir William Robertson calls upon history to bear out his contention that, by every 'rule of war,' we should adopt the first alternative adumbrated by the Prime Minister.

I do not think that military history will support this view.

It is probable that after the experiences of the War our ideas of strategy will undergo considerable modification.

The increased power conferred on the defence by modern weapons and inventions postpones a decision for so great a length of time that war, in a far greater degree than formerly, affects the innate resources and the vital power of a nation. The immense size of modern armies and the extent of territory over which they fight brings of necessity many different races and nationalities within the orbit of war influence. The submarine and the aeroplane bring new and untried factors into the problem.

For all these reasons political considerations enter much more than formerly into the problems of strategy. Many of the older 'rules of war' are no longer applicable.

The C.I.G.S. further draws attention to the danger of 'gamble' at this stage of the War, and he characterises as such the suggested operations in Syria. To my mind, the idea of staking the remainder of our resources on one desperate blow after another on the Western Front has become much more of a 'gamble' than anything else we have undertaken in the War. This method has been given a very long and patient trial under the most favourable conditions. It has entailed enormous loss and produced comparatively little result. We might be justified in trying it further if we had an unlimited number of men, but we are not justified in risking in such a process and after such a long trial, the very limited balance of our resources. Such an attempt, after the experience we have gained, would be a 'gamble' of the very worst kind."

He has an interesting paragraph about the Nivelle offensive and the deprecatory reference made by Sir William Robertson to what he called "the Nivelle era and its consequences": —

"It is sought to depict the French attack of April in a very unfavourable light as compared with our own result at Ypres. Such a comparison is misleading.

General Nivelle made as long, if not a longer, advance than we

have yet accomplished in the Ypres area. By his capture of the Chemin des Dames Ridge, the important railway communication between Soissons and Rheims was opened up and is now of the utmost value to the French.

If General Nivelles can be accused of failure it could only be on the ground that he expressed himself too confidently as to what he could accomplish, and that he absolutely under-rated the enemy's power of resistance. Have we not all been more or less guilty of such faults?

After very severe fighting, which has lasted since 31st July, and very heavy losses, we are not yet in complete possession of Passchendaele Ridge, but only of its southern extremity. This ridge extends some miles north of Passchendaele.

The further statement that 'we can beat the Germans every time we fight them and inflict heavier losses than we ourselves suffer,' is, in my judgment, somewhat optimistic."

He points out that, although Sir William Robertson condemns the principle of "unity of Command" and "one front," when the idea is to centre them in the hands of a French or other general, it seems to be highly approved of if we can "acquire it for ourselves."

He then makes some searching comments on the functions of the C.I.G.S.:—

"Far be it from me to say that the Field-Marshal is not justified in feeling the utmost confidence in himself and his troops. But I think this most natural and commendable state of mind has somewhat warped his judgment in appreciating the situation on the Western Front. Confidence in themselves and their own troops, even though somewhat extravagant, is not to be deprecated in Commanders who are ever in close contact with their enemy. But when it is a question of directing a war which is going on over half the world, offering for this reason, so many alternative possibilities, the conclusions arrived at and the recommendations made by any individual Commander in the field, must be subjected to the crucial test of exhaustive examination by the General Staff. Their functions are to take a deliberate and dispassionate survey of the whole situation, to form *their own* estimate of the results attained, to balance those results most carefully with the price paid for them in the shape of losses, expenditure of ammunition and wearing out of guns, and to keep ever in mind the limitation of the national resources in man-power and in every other respect. Finally, and above all, it is their duty to give completely independent advice to the Government.

Every statement, every estimate and every forecast made by the Commander-in-Chief in France, should be put to the most crucial test.

After making a close examination of the papers submitted to me, I have, rightly or wrongly, formed the opinion that this has not been done. Statements from the front have not been sufficiently tested as to their accuracy, and have, to a great extent, formed the basis of the war plan and schemes which are put forward for sanction by the War Cabinet."

He is careful to say that he does not wish anything in his memorandum to convey the impression that he under-estimated the splendid work done by the Army in France:—

"They have delivered tactical blows under which the enemy has reeled: but this magnificent performance has led to no strategic result, and our limited resources in man-power will not allow us to reach a strategic end by tactical slogging alone."

He comes to the conclusion that—

"our strength, so far as our own forces are concerned, is being gradually sapped by the enemy in indecisive attacks which attain inadequate results and entail undue loss. If such results can ever become possible, they can only be brought about by husbanding our strength and resources with the greatest care, by awaiting a much fuller development of the fighting forces of the United States, and by careful co-ordination of the strategic possibilities and economising of resources of all the Allies on the Western Front. For these and other reasons mentioned before I do not think a *purely military* climax can be reached in 1918."

[This prediction was verified in the ultimate result. It was the Revolution behind the lines, attributable to the privations endured by the German population, coupled with the collapse of Germany's Allies, that precipitated the end.]

"It is my fixed belief that such co-ordination and economy can only be obtained by establishing a common co-ordinating authority over the whole front from the Adriatic to the North Sea."

As to the idea of making Syria for a time the theatre of war, he would have favoured the project, had time allowed:—

"Without under-estimating these manifest drawbacks to making Syria for a time the main theatre of war, I would have favoured the project had time allowed.

If plans had been considered and the necessary arrangements made some months ago, I believe this alternative would have been the right one to adopt, and that the coming of the spring might have found us at peace with Turkey and Bulgaria."



As to an attack on the Italian Front, that would depend on the co-operation of France and the whole-hearted co-operation of the Italian Government. His main conclusion is that there ought to be a Superior Council of the Allies immediately set up:—

“I would therefore emphasise the extreme desirability of establishing at once a Superior Council of the Allies. It is only such a body that can thoroughly examine a joint scheme of action in all its bearings. The weight and influence of such a Council must carry conviction to the minds of the several Allied Governments.

. . . That the representatives of the Allied Powers should meet together without delay to discuss the immediate formation and establishment of a Superior War Council. . . . I think this body should be composed of the Prime Ministers or their selected representatives, and one or more Generals from each Allied country.

That the Supreme Council at once proceed to appreciate the general situation and to formulate plans.

I quite realise the difficulty in including Russia in these arrangements, but I do not regard her representation as absolutely essential.”

Sir Henry Wilson's memorandum practically came to the same conclusion. He reviewed the military position from the standpoint of a confirmed Westerner:—

“If I may be allowed here to interpose a remark about myself, it is to say that I have always been (even years before the War broke out) and I shall always remain, an ardent ‘Westerner,’ for the simple reason that it is along the West Front that the bulk of the forces of our principal enemy is disposed and the death grapple must always be with those forces; but, on the other hand, I hold that this death grapple must be engaged in at the time and place and in the manner best suited to our cause.

It is no use throwing ‘decisive numbers at the decisive time at the decisive place’ at my head if the decisive numbers do not exist, if the decisive hour has not struck or if the decisive place is ill-chosen.

We seem to be as confident of success when Russia and Roumania have collapsed and France is temporarily weakened as we were when all these three countries were capable of heavy offensive actions.

The German has done otherwise.

Finding in the winter of 1914 and 1915 and during the course of 1915 that he could not gain a final decision in the West or in the East, he at once turned his attention to other theatres and tried, sometimes successfully, sometimes unsuccessfully, for decisions in those theatres; thus, he failed in Mesopotamia and again in Egypt, but he succeeded in the Balkans, in Roumania and now in Russia.

His underlying thought being that he would weaken his enemies in all theatres and strengthen himself not only in territory, in food, in raw material, etc., but also in morale, and put himself in the position to mass a much larger number of troops in the decisive theatre (i.e., in the West) when the time for the death-grapple came.

It is incontestable that the German position is better to-day with all the gains I have mentioned above (*vis-à-vis* terms of peace) than it would be had they not gained Turkey and Bulgaria as allies, had they not effectively occupied Roumania, Poland, and part of Russia; had they in fact, during the last two years, restricted themselves to attempting a final decision, as we have done, in the main theatre, i.e., the West.

I have made these comparisons of the application of a precept not in order to prove that the West is not the decisive front—because it is—but because it seems to me that the final decision can only be reached where decisive numbers are applied at the decisive place and at the decisive time, and the numbers and the place and the time are not yet, and the Germans are trying their best that they never shall be.

Curiously enough, our constant thought of a decision in the West—a frame of mind amounting almost to an obsession—has led us to consider only that part of the Western Front which is held by ourselves, and partly because of this and partly from other causes the tendency for the whole line from Nieuport to Trieste to be cut up into three sections—British, French, Italian—has become more and more accentuated. This is noticeable in Sir Douglas Haig's memorandum of 8th October, 1917 and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff's memorandum of 9th October, 1917, although the latter very wisely remarks that 'the British Army alone cannot win the War. Our Allies must be made to fight.' "

He then leads up to the same conclusion as Lord French:—

"The superior direction of this war, has, in my opinion, been gravely at fault from the very commencement—in fact, it is inside the truth to say that there has never been any superior direction at all.

Up to the time when Marshal Joffre was removed from the Chief Command of the French he tried, with poor results indeed, but still he tried, to assume and exercise a kind of benevolent control over all the Allies, but his position was not sufficiently exalted, his powers were not sufficiently great to admit of success.

Since then we have tried many expedients but always with most disappointing, sometimes even with disastrous results. We have had frequent meetings of Ministers, constant conversations between Chiefs of Staff, deliberations of Commanders-in-Chief, mass meetings of all these high officials in London, in Paris, in Rome. We

have tried the experiment of placing one Commander-in-Chief under the orders of another and all these endeavours have failed to attain any real concerted and co-ordinated effort in diplomacy, in strategy, in fighting or in the production of war material. . . . I do not wish to exaggerate, but human nature being what it is and our Commanders-in-Chief and Chiefs of Staff being what they are—all men of strong and decided views, all men whose whole energies are devoted to their own fronts, and their own national concerns, we get as a natural and inevitable result a war conducted not as a whole, but as a war on sections of the whole, i.e., a war on the British Front, a war on the French Front, a war on the Italian Front; and the stronger and the better the various Chiefs, the more isolated and detached the plans.

It seems to me that all this confusion, overlapping and loss of collective effort are due to the same causes which throughout the whole war have led to a narrow vision, and too limited outlook over the whole colossal struggle; and the better the sectional Commanders-in-Chief are, the more loyal and responsive the Chiefs of the Home Staffs, the more we see the whole of the national effort restricted to the national fronts.

The net result seems to me to be that we take short views instead of long views, we look for decisions to-day instead of laying out plans for to-morrow, and as a sequence we have constant change of plans, with growing and increasing irritation and inefficiency.

This is the picture that I see and that I have seen for a long time.

What can be done to remedy a state of affairs which is undoubtedly prolonging the War to an unnecessary, even to a dangerous extent?

The answer to this question lies in the establishment of an intelligent, effective and powerful superior direction. And by this I mean a small War Cabinet of the Allies so well-informed, and above all, entrusted with such power that its opinion on all the larger issues of the War will carry the weight of conviction and be accepted by each of the Allies as final. There is no question here of overruling the Home Cabinet, since the Supreme War Cabinet, or Superior Direction, as I have called it, will represent the Home Cabinets, nor is there the least danger of any interference with the soldiers in the field, since the Chiefs of Staff in each country will remain as to-day.

Such a Body will be above all Sectional Fronts, it would view the War as a whole, it would treat the line of battle from Nieuport to Mesopotamia as one line, and it would allot to each of the Allies the part which it would play. Perhaps I can make myself clearer if I take one or two concrete instances.

Such a Superior Direction would, two years or a year ago, have



come to the conclusion as to whether we should have sought for a final decision *then*, on the Western Front, or whether the time for such an attempt should be postponed until a favourable decision had been reached in some of the minor theatres, thus enabling a larger force to be concentrated at a later date for the death-grapple in the West.

Such a Superior Direction would *now* lay out the broad line of action for the next 12 or 24 months. It would show when and under what conditions and in which part of the main theatre the final decision should be attempted and reached.

This done, it would be in a position to settle the pending and vexed question of our taking over more line from the French—a question impossible to solve to the satisfaction of both parties if no plans for the future have been agreed to, but quite easy to solve when the broad lines of next year's campaign have been arranged. It would lay out the broad policy for our joint aeroplane campaign of the future, and would adjust construction to obtain the end in view, allotting to each Ally the task for the future.

In short, such a Superior Direction would take over the Superior Direction of the War—a thing which has not yet been done, and for the lack of which we have suffered so grievously in the past and without which we shall, as certainly, suffer even more in the future.

The strain of this war increases day by day, and as the strain increases, so any mistakes that are made become increasingly dangerous, and the tendency for each of the Allies to fight for its own hand becomes more and more marked. I see no other way of drawing the Allies together and of keeping them together, of gradually enlarging the outlook and of showing the crying necessity for long views instead of short views, except by the creation of such a body. I see no other way by which a real plan of campaign for the future can be drawn up. Such a plan of campaign must be based on all the factors which go to make up this gigantic war. The greater part of these are unknown and necessarily and rightly unknown, to the Commanders-in-Chief in the field who, up till now, have dictated the strategy of the campaign, each on his own front.

Without such a body the tendency for the Allies will be to concentrate each on his own front, each on his own production, each on his own war, each thus drifting further and further from his neighbour, while all the time the enemy, under one governing authority, will be able to concentrate and to defeat each of the local efforts.

We (the Allies) hold all the cards in our hands—men, munitions, guns, aeroplanes, food, money *and* the High Seas—there remains only the question of how to play them and when to play them, and my absolute conviction is that there is no other way than by the creation of a Superior Direction."

On finding that my views as to an Inter-Allied War Council were supported so unreservedly by two of the ablest Generals in the British Army, I proceeded to sound French Ministers on the point. I had several conferences on the theme of a United War Direction with M. Painlevé, the French Minister of War, to whom the same idea had occurred. On 30th October, I wrote him as follows:—

“ Dear M. Painlevé,

I have been discussing with my colleagues for some time past the future strategy of the War. I have come to certain provisional conclusions which I am anxious to communicate to you without delay. I am, therefore, sending you this letter in the hope that after you have had time to consider it, we may be able to discuss together the matters to which it refers.

The hard fact which stares us in the face to-day is that at the end of three years' strenuous war and after the utmost exertions on the part of the Allies, the German Government is still militarily triumphant. Despite all the battles won by the Allies this year—and these victories are undoubtedly brilliant—and the perfection of the equipment and training which the French and British Armies have reached and their valour in the field, the Germans have been able to end the year, not only with a military and naval success against Russia, but with a strategic victory of considerable magnitude over the Italians, a victory which has compelled us to send strong reinforcements to their assistance, and which may profoundly alter the face of the War.

Even without this final disaster the campaign of 1917 would unquestionably have been a bitter disappointment to the Allies. At the outset they were confident that, as the result of a great converging movement directed against Germany, they would make a decisive impression upon the military position of the enemy alliance, if they did not overthrow its military organisation altogether. The failure to do so, has, of course, been mainly due to the collapse of the Russian Armies. It is also true that, as the result of the shortage of food and other essential supplies the longing for peace among the peoples of the Central Empires has reached an intensity which threatens the disintegration of the whole combination. None the less, I am convinced from my experience of the last three years that the fact that the result of the third year's war is a definite military success for Germany and a definite military reverse for the Allies is in great measure also due to defects in their mutual arrangements for conducting the War.

As compared with the enemy, the fundamental weakness of the Allies is that the direction of their military operations lacks real unity. At a very early stage of the War Germany established

a practically despotic dominion over all her allies. She not only reorganised their armies and assumed direction of the military strategy, but she took control also over their economic resources so that the Central Empires and Turkey are to-day, to all intents and purposes, a military Empire with one command and one front. The Allies, on the other hand, have never followed suit. The direction of the War on their side has remained in the hands of four separate Governments and four separate General Staffs, each of which is possessed of complete knowledge only of its own front and its own national resources, and which draws up a plan of campaign which is designed to produce results mainly on its own section of front. Attempts have been made to remedy the defects of this system by means of Inter-Allied Conferences, which have lately been of increased frequency. But up to the present these conferences have never been fully representative, and at best have done little more than attempt to synchronise what are in reality four separate plans of campaign. There has never been an Allied body which had the knowledge of the resources of all the Allies, which could prepare a single co-ordinated plan for utilising those resources in the most decisive manner, taking into account the political, economic, and diplomatic as well as the military weaknesses of the Central Powers.

The crushing of Serbia and the opening of the road to the East in 1915, the total defeat of Roumania in 1916, and now the breakthrough in Italy in 1917, may be largely, although not entirely, traced to the attempt to conduct the War in a series of water-tight compartments. It is very remarkable that each winter the Central Powers have been able to make a crushing attack on the weakest member of the Entente with complete success while no adequate counter-preparation has been made by the Allies to meet the danger, and that during these same winters no corresponding serious efforts have been made by the Allies to weaken Germany by concentrating against her weaker Allies and so destroying the props upon which her power depends. These results, which mean that the enemy has steadily deprived us of the preponderance of men and resources we would otherwise have possessed, while compelling us to squander our resources all over the globe without achieving decisive results anywhere, would probably never have happened, had there been any such unity of direction on the Allied side as exists in the case of the Germanic Alliance. If we are to win the War, it will only be because the Allied nations are willing to subordinate everything else to the supreme purpose of bringing to bear upon the Central Empires in the most effective manner possible, the maximum pressure military, economic, and political which the Allies can command.

There is, I am sure, only one way in which this can be done, and



that is by creating a joint council—a kind of Inter-Allied General Staff—to work out the plans and watch continuously the course of events, for the Allies as a whole. This council would not, of course, supersede the several Governments. It would simply be advisory to them, the final decisions, and the orders necessary to give effect to them, being given by the Governments concerned. But it would be a council possessed of full knowledge of the resources of all the Allies, not only in men and munitions, but in shipping, railway material and so forth, which would act as a kind of General Staff to the Alliance to advise as to the best methods of winning the War, looking at the fronts and the resources available as a whole. Its composition might be settled later. But provisionally I would suggest that it should consist of one, or perhaps two, political representatives of first-rate authority from each of the Allies, with a military staff of its own and possibly naval and economic staffs as well. The military representatives would remain in continuous session at whatever place was chosen as the scene of the Council's labours and could therefore not be the same people as the chiefs of the several national General Staffs, though they would have to be in closest touch with them. It would also be the same with the naval and economic staffs if it were found necessary to attach them also.

This brings me to the second point. I do not think it is possible to decide about the taking over of more line by the British without regard to the plan of campaign for next year. The question of who is to hold the line during the winter is inseparable from that of the character and extent of the offensive next year and the respective parts to be played by the various allies in that offensive, because the Armies which are to take the offensive must spend the winter in hard training. This is exactly the sort of question which would be referred to the Allied Council. I therefore consider that it is of the utmost urgency that a decision should be come to about the Council without delay, and if the proposal is approved that it should be constituted as soon as possible.

I would, therefore, be greatly obliged, if you would let me know at your early convenience whether the French Government would support this idea and co-operate with us in giving effect to it.

Ever sincerely,

D. LLOYD GEORGE."

M. Painlevé came over to London to discuss the proposal set forth in that letter. On 2nd November, I reported to the Cabinet that I had seen him and that the French Government accepted the scheme for the establishment of a Supreme Inter-Allied Council and Permanent Advisory General Staff. General Pétain, whom I had also seen, cordially approved the scheme, and had expressed the opinion

that, in view of the very serious position on the Italian Front, the new organisation should set to work as soon as possible.

After some discussion, the War Cabinet decided:—

(a) To accept in principle the proposal for the establishment of a Supreme Inter-Allied Council consisting of the Prime Minister and one other Minister, who would meet at frequent intervals together with a Permanent Inter-Allied Advisory General Staff composed of one General Officer from each of the principal Allies.

(b) That Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Wilson should be appointed the British General on the Inter-Allied Advisory General Staff, and that it should be a recommendation to the Secretary of State for War that the appointment should carry with it the temporary rank of General. The Secretary of State for War expressed his approval of General Wilson's appointment.

(c) That the Secretary should formally communicate the two above decisions to the Secretary of State for War, who would notify his appointment to Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Wilson and arrange details as to his pay and staff.

(d) That no announcement in regard to the Supreme Inter-Allied Council and General Staff, or in regard to General Wilson's appointment, should be made until the attitude of the Italian Government towards the scheme had been ascertained.

(e) That the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should telegraph to the Italian Government the general lines of the scheme.

At the same meeting it was decided that owing to the gravity of the position on the Italian Front, arising out of the Caporetto disaster, I should at once leave for Italy to confer with the Italian Government. I communicated my intention to M. Painlevé and suggested that we should settle the draft of our plan for a Supreme Inter-Allied Council at Paris on our way to Italy, and take immediate steps to set it up. I sent on to him the draft we had prepared in order to give him time to study it carefully, and he replied to me as follows:—

“ Paris,  
4th November, 1917.

Dear Prime Minister,

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 30th October, which I have passed on to the French War Committee, who are in full agreement with its leading ideas.

The ideas are furthermore in complete accord with those which, on behalf of the War Committee, M. Franklin Bouillon and myself had the honour of expounding to you at our interviews of

9th-13th October. For a long time past the French Government and Parliament have been pressing for such a co-ordination to be established between the Allies. To bring about the collaboration and inter-locking of the Allied War Committees, we proposed to you in particular, in our conversations at the beginning of October, that each War Committee should delegate in a permanent manner two of its members, to take part in the work of War Committees of the other countries. To this conception would naturally be attached the creation of an Inter-Allied General Staff.

Thus the proposals which you are so good as to lay before us fit in perfectly with those which we were commissioned to present to you. The events on the Italian Front can only make their realisation more desirable and more urgent. At the same time, the scheme which accompanies your letter, and defines the future supreme war council, seems to us to call for certain modifications, which will not in any way alter its spirit, but will define certain details in such a way as to avoid any misunderstandings in the future.

I have accordingly the honour to enclose you herewith the modified scheme, with the certainty that we shall without difficulty reach a mutual understanding upon an authoritative text which will express our common ideas.

Begging you to be assured, Mr. Prime Minister, of my high regard, and of my feelings of cordial devotion.

PAUL PAINLEVÉ."

At the Rapallo Conference the final draft for the constitution of a Supreme Inter-Allied War Council was settled and agreed to as follows: —

"I. The representatives of the British, French and Italian Governments assembled at Rapallo on the 7th November, 1917, have agreed on the scheme for the organisation of a Supreme War Council with a Permanent Military Representative from each Power, contained in the following paragraph.

#### SCHEME OF ORGANISATION OF A SUPREME WAR COUNCIL

II. (1) With a view to the better co-ordination of military action on the Western Front a Supreme War Council is created, composed of the Prime Minister and a Member of the Government of each of the Great Powers whose armies are fighting on that front. The extension of the scope of the Council to other fronts is reserved for discussion with the other Great Powers.

(2) The Supreme War Council has for its mission to watch over the general conduct of the War. It prepares recommendations



for the decision of the Governments, and keeps itself informed of their execution and reports thereon to the respective Governments.

(3) The General Staffs and Military Commands of the Armies of each Power charged with the conduct of military operations remain responsible to their respective Governments.

(4) The general war plans drawn up by the competent Military Authorities are submitted to the Supreme War Council, which under the high authority of the Governments, ensures their concordance, and submits, if need be, any necessary changes.

(5) Each Power delegates to the Supreme War Council one Permanent Military Representative whose exclusive function is to act as technical adviser to the Council.

(6) The Military Representatives receive from the Government and the competent Military Authorities of their country all the proposals, information and documents relating to the conduct of the War.

(7) The Military Representatives watch day by day the situation of the forces, and of the means of all kinds of which the Allied Armies and the enemy armies dispose.

(8) The Supreme War Council meets normally at Versailles, where the Permanent Military Representatives and their Staffs are established. They may meet at other places as may be agreed upon, according to circumstances. The meetings of the Supreme War Council will take place at least once a month.

III. The Permanent Military Representatives will be as follows:—

For France .....	General Foch.
„ Great Britain .....	General Wilson.
„ Italy .....	General Cadorna

Rapallo, 7th November, 1917.”

The only difficulty or disagreement that occurred in the course of the discussion arose as to which would be the most suitable place for the establishment of the Council. The French representatives were anxious it should be Paris. I was very insistent that it should be located somewhere outside in order that it should not only be entirely independent of the French Government, but that the fact of its independence should thereby be emphasised. At last M. Painlevé agreed to Versailles.

The question of an Inter-Allied Naval Council was left to be determined later on.

Sir William Robertson ostentatiously declined to attend the discussions on the Supreme Council. His general sulkiness was apparent to all. He left the room with a flaunting stride, the moment the idea of a Supreme Inter-Allied Council was mentioned, just stopping on

the way for an instant to instruct Sir Maurice Hankey to make a note of the fact that he was not present during the discussions. He wished Sir Maurice to send for him when the Conference passed on to other subjects. He said: "I wash my hands of this business." His whole attitude during the Rapallo Conference was sullen and unhelpful, and it was ominous of acute trouble to come in our future relations. He meant to fight the Inter-Allied Council.

The first question referred to the new Council was the situation on the Italian Front. It was directed to report immediately on the position: —

"In consultation with the Italian General Headquarters they should examine into the present state of affairs, and, on a general review of the military situation in all theatres, should advise as to the amount and nature of assistance to be given by the British and French Governments, and as to the manner in which it should be applied.

The Italian Government undertakes to instruct the Italian Supreme Command to give every facility to the Permanent Military Representatives both in regard to documentary information and movements in the zone of operations."

The Military Members of the Inter-Allied Council proceeded immediately to the Italian Front to examine the position. I accompanied them as far as Peschiera on my visit to meet the King of Italy. This meeting I have already described. Robertson returned to England to reorganise his broken front. The articles and paragraphs which appeared in the anti-Government Press soon after his arrival showed that the preliminary bombardment had commenced, and I knew the parliamentary attack would follow. It would be a formidable offensive. Mr. Asquith was to lead the assault in person. He had a large personal following amongst the Liberals. He could also count on the Irish and the pacifist section of the Labour Party. A number of influential Conservatives were disposed to back up military authority against civilian criticism. It was a powerful if ill-assorted confederacy. If the Staff could rally a sufficient number of these Conservatives in support, the Government might very well be beaten. For that I was quite prepared. I preferred this rather than remaining responsible any longer for a military policy that was dissipating the strength of our fine Army in carrying out the fatuous and wasteful schemes of purblind and obdurate sectionalism. Our greatest peril, the submarine attacks, was in a fair way to being overcome. Our food supply was assured for another year. We had gone through most of the period of waiting for the Americans, in spite of Russian defection, without being overwhelmed. As a free lance I would be able to talk more freely about the military leadership and thus rouse public opinion to correct its shortcomings. I

knew the soldiers in the field were not behind the Staffs and would be only too glad to find someone giving expression to their dissatisfaction. I therefore made up my mind to take up the challenge of the War Office junta and its friends.

It was arranged that the setting up of the Council should be announced by M. Painlevé at a luncheon in Paris, to which all the Deputies and Senators should be invited. At that function I delivered a speech in which I explained the reason for taking this step. In the course of my speech I placed before the distinguished assembly of French politicians and publicists a candid survey of the military position as it appeared to me. I pointed out that we had failed up to that date to make the best of the advantages we possessed by sea and land, that the fault had not been with the armies: it had been entirely due to the absence of real unity in the war direction of the Allied countries. From there I proceeded:—

“As my colleagues here know very well, there have been many attempts made to achieve strategic unity. Conferences have been annually held to concert united action for the campaign of the coming year. Great Generals came from many lands to Paris with carefully and skilfully prepared plans for their own fronts. In the absence of a genuine Inter-Allied Council of men responsible as much for one part of the battlefield as for another there was a sensitiveness, a delicacy about even tendering advice, letting alone support for any sector other than that for which the Generals were themselves directly responsible. But there had to be an appearance of a strategic whole, so they all sat at the same table and metaphorically, took thread and needle, sewed these plans together, and produced them to a subsequent civilian conference as one great strategic piece; and it was solemnly proclaimed to the world the following morning that the unity of the Allies was complete.

That unity, in so far as strategy went, was pure make-believe; and make-believe may live through a generation of peace—it cannot survive a week of war. It was a collection of completely independent schemes pieced together. *Stitching is not strategy*. So it came to pass that when these plans were worked out in the terrible realities of war, the stitches came out and disintegration was complete.

I know the answer that is given to an appeal for unity of control. It is that Germany and Austria are acting on interior lines, whereas we are on external lines. That is no answer. That fact simply affords an additional argument for unification of effort in order to overcome the natural advantages possessed by the foe.

You have only to summarise events to realise how many of the failures from which we have suffered are attributable to this one fundamental defect in the Allied war organisation. . . .”



I then summarised the successes which Germany had achieved owing entirely to the fact that we had not realised the importance of treating the whole front as one and indivisible. As to the Italian disaster, I said it was no use minimising its extent. If we did, then we would never take adequate steps to repair it:—

“When we advance a kilometre into the enemy’s lines, snatch a small shattered village out of his cruel grip, capture a few hundred of his soldiers, we shout with unfeigned joy. And rightly so, for it is the symbol of our superiority over a boastful foe and a sure guarantee that in the end we can and shall win.

But what if we had advanced 50 kilometres beyond his lines and made 200,000 of his soldiers prisoners and taken 2,500 of his best guns, with enormous quantities of ammunition and stores?\*

What print would we have for our headlines? Have you any idea how long it would take the arsenals of France and Great Britain to manufacture 2,500 guns? . . .”

I told them that I believed we had at last learnt the lesson of the essential unity of all the Allied fronts. If I was right in my conjecture, the new Supreme Council would be given real power and the efforts of the Allies would be co-ordinated and victory would await valour. We should then live to bless even the Italian disaster, for without it I did not believe it would have been possible to secure real unity. I then read a very remarkable message from Washington, which had appeared in the *Times*, and said that shrewd men in America, calmly observing the course of events from a distance of thousands of miles, had come to conclusions which we would have done well to make ours years ago. The message ran:—

“It is realised here that delicate questions of prestige exist between the great European nations engaged in the War, and that this militates against quick decisions and effective action when these are most needed. It is believed by some of President Wilson’s closest advisers that Germany owes much of her success in this war to her unity of control, which permits the full direction of all Teutonic efforts from Berlin. Indeed, it is felt here that unless the Allies can achieve a degree of co-ordination equal to that which has enabled Germany to score her striking, though perhaps ineffectual successes, she will be able to hold out far longer than otherwise would have been believed possible. American military experts believe that if the Allied help rushed to General Cadorna’s assistance to stem the tide of invasion had been thrown into the balance when Italy’s forces were within 40 miles of Laibach, the Allies would have been able to force the road to Vienna. Victory at Laibach would have spelled a new Austerlitz, and the magnitude

\* I understated the total losses of Caporetto.

of the prize almost within its grasp is believed here to have justified General Cadorna in taking the risk of advancing his centre too far and temporarily weakening his left flank. The lack of co-operation between France, Great Britain, and Italy is blamed here for the disaster which ensued, and which it is believed would not have occurred if one supreme military authority had directed the combined operations of the Allies with the sole aim of victory without regard to any other considerations." I continued: —

"You may say the American estimate of the possibilities of the Italian Front for the Allies is too favourable. Why? It is not for me to express an opinion. I am but a civilian; but I am entitled to point out that the Austrian Army is certainly not better than the Italian. On the contrary, whenever there was a straight fight between the Italians and the Austrians, the former invariably won. And the Germans are certainly no better than the British and the French troops. When there has been a straight fight between them we have invariably defeated their best and most vaunted regiments. And as for the difficulties of getting there, what we have already accomplished in the course of the last few days is the best answer to that."

It might be said that the Americans at that distance from the battle area were not competent to form an opinion on the military possibilities. On the other hand, there lies much truth in the saying that outsiders see most of the game, and they certainly could judge it more calmly and impartially.

I said that national and professional traditions, prestige and susceptibilities had hitherto all conspired to render nugatory our best resolutions, but now we had set up this Council our business was to see that "the unity it represents is a fact and not a fraud." I apologised for having spoken with perhaps brutal frankness at the risk of much misconception here and elsewhere, and risk perhaps of giving temporary encouragement to the foe.

"We shall win, but I want to win as soon as possible. I want to win with as little sacrifice as possible. I want as many as possible of that splendid young manhood which has helped to win victory to live through to enjoy its fruits.

Unity—not sham unity, but real unity—is the only sure pathway to victory. The magnitude of the sacrifices made by the people of all the Allied countries ought to impel us to suppress all minor appeals in order to attain the common purpose of all this sacrifice. All personal, all sectional, considerations should be relentlessly suppressed. This is one of the greatest hours in the history of mankind. Let us not dishonour greatness with pettiness. . . ."

When I returned to England there were a great many signs of arranged and co-ordinated criticism and I think I can say intrigue, against the new move. Papers which had hitherto received their inspiration from the War Office were particularly hostile. For instance, one paper had an article headed "Hands off the Army." The *Times* was chilly. Mr. Asquith sympathised with the criticism and was prepared to make himself the spokesman of the General Staff. On the day I returned, he asked a question in Parliament which clearly indicated the attitude he had assumed. One paragraph out of that question will illustrate what I mean: —

"Whether it is proposed that the Council is, if so advised by its Staff, to have power to interfere with or override the opinion on matters of strategy of the General Staff at home, and of the Commanders-in-Chief in the field."

My answer gave the view of the British, French, and Italian Governments as to the general nature of the functions which we proposed that the Inter-Allied Council should discharge. I quoted the terms of the Rapallo agreement, the text of which I have given already. I proceeded: —

"From the foregoing it will be clear that the Council will have no executive power, and that the final decisions in matters of strategy and as to the distribution and movements of the various armies in the field will rest with the several Governments of the Allies. There will be, therefore, no Operations Department attached to the Council. The Permanent Military Representatives will derive from the existing Intelligence Departments of the Allies all the information necessary in order to enable them to submit advice to the Supreme Allied Council. The object of the Allies has been to set up a central body charged with the duty of continuously surveying the field of operations as a whole and, by the light of information derived from all fronts and from all Governments and Staffs, of co-ordinating the plans prepared by the different General Staffs, and, if necessary, of making proposals of their own for the better conduct of the War. Should the House desire an opportunity of discussing this important subject and my Paris speech, the Government would propose to set aside Monday next for the purpose."

A debate was arranged to take place in the House of Commons on 19th November. On the day the discussion took place, President Wilson issued a message indicating that he was in complete accord with the action taken by the Allied Governments, and that he was prepared not merely to associate himself with the Council but to take an official part in its deliberations: —



“Colonel House, Head of the American Mission and Special Representative of President Wilson in Europe, has received a cable from the President stating emphatically that the Government of the United States considers that unity of plan and control between all the Allies and the United States is essential in order to achieve a just and permanent peace.

The President emphasises the fact that this unity must be accomplished if the great resources of the United States are to be used to the best advantage, and he requests Colonel House to confer with the heads of the Allied Governments with a view to achieving the closest possible co-operation.

President Wilson has asked Colonel House to attend the first meeting of the Supreme War Council with General Bliss, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, as the Military Adviser. It is hoped that the meeting will take place in Paris before the end of this month.”

In the debate Mr. Asquith was critical, but not as censorious as those who supplied his brief would have wished. He defended the action of the High Commands over Serbia, Roumania and Russia by saying:—

“The experts may have been wrong. I do not claim any infallibility for them. I myself think they were right. That is a point that only history can decide.”

As far as Serbia was concerned, the best answer to this defence of the military leaders and the head of the Government of that day was given by Mr. Noel-Buxton (now Lord Noel-Buxton) later in the debate. Mr. Buxton was the greatest authority on the Balkans in the House of Commons. He gave illustrations from his own knowledge of the fatal delays of 1915 in dealing with the Balkan situation, owing to the lack of co-ordination amongst the Allies.

His view was that had the Inter-Allied Council been in existence at that date, these delays would not have arisen and he expressed the opinion that:—

“There cannot be the slightest doubt that if by hook or crook, co-ordination could have been brought about as early as that in the War, the whole situation would have been different and obviously the War would have been over long ago.”

Mr. Asquith dwelt at length on the absence of naval representation on the new Council. I replied that provision had already been made for a permanent naval representative to keep the military advisers at Versailles informed on all naval questions which bore on their tasks. I also indicated that we were considering setting up another Inter-Allied Council to co-ordinate naval strategy. That was done a few

weeks later. Mr. Asquith deprecated strongly the idea of unity of command. I agreed with him to the extent of saying that the appointment of a *Generalissimo* of the whole of the forces of the Allies was impracticable.

There was an underlying suggestion of interference by the Government with the soldiers in the discharge of their functions. Mr. Asquith hinted at it. The War Office Press accused us openly of meddling. I dealt with this accusation by saying:—

“ . . . I will lay down two propositions, and I defy any man to challenge them. The first is this: No soldiers in any war have had their strategical dispositions less interfered with by politicians. There has not been a single battalion, or a single gun moved this year except with the advice of the General Staff—not one. There has not been a single attack by British troops ordered in any part of the battlefield except on the advice of the General Staff—not one. There has not been a single attack not ordered. The whole campaign of the year has been the result of the advice of soldiers. Never in the whole history of war in this country have soldiers got more consistent and more substantial backing from politicians than they have had this year. What do I mean by ‘backing’? I do not mean ‘backing’ in speeches. I mean backing in guns, backing in ammunition, backing in transport, shipping, railways, supplies and men. Speeches are no substitute for shells.

I have only twice during this war acted against the advice of soldiers. The first occasion was with the gun programme. I laid down a programme which was in advance of the advice of soldiers and against it. They thought that I was manufacturing too many and was extravagant. They thought that they would not be necessary, and that they could not man them. I took a different view, and there is not a soldier to-day who will not say that I was right. I was told that I was mad. That, I think, was the word used. There were the same attacks in the Press. What was the second occasion? The second case where I pressed my advice on soldiers against their will was in the appointment of a civilian to reorganise the railways behind the lines—my right honourable friend (Sir Eric Geddes)—and I am proud to have done it. . . .”

Mr. Asquith's supporters in the debate made clear the source of their inspiration. The gravamen of their charge was that the new Council was intended to supersede Sir William Robertson and they urged that he should be our principal military representative at Versailles. I could not have assented to that proposition without stultifying the whole aim and purpose of the scheme. He would have obstructed and thwarted at every turn. Independent examination of strategy on the basis of a united front would have been a farce had he been the chief military representative of the British Government.

Mr. Asquith was very insistent that in his day the Inter-Allied Conferences supplemented by liaison officers secured the necessary co-ordination of policy and strategy between the Allies. To this claim I answered:—

“The present system is a sporadic one, where you have meetings perhaps once every three or four months, barely that—there is only one meeting a year between the whole of the staffs; that has been the rule—for the purpose of settling the strategy of the Allies over the whole of the battle front, which extends over thousands and thousands of miles of front, with millions of men in embattled array upon those fronts. A single day, with perhaps a morning added! No generals, however great their intuition, no generals, whatever their genius, could settle the strategy of a year with a sitting which will only last over five or six hours. Utterly impossible! Therefore, it is an essential part of the scheme that this body should be permanent, that they should sit together day by day, with all the information derived from every front before them, with a view to co-ordinating the plans of the General Staffs over all the fronts.”

As an attack on the Government, the debate was an utter failure. Mr. Pringle, who always prepared and organised these raids against the Government, in the course of his speech disclosed its main object. It was to bring about the fall of the Government.\* This was to be done by rallying the friends of Sir William Robertson from every quarter. Had it succeeded, the war direction would have passed entirely into his hands. Whoever would be nominal Prime Minister, the C.I.G.S. would be a military dictator. The extent of the failure of this parliamentary manœuvre was revealed by the change in the attitude of the *Times*. Before the debate its tone was hostile. It now said:—

“The Prime Minister achieved a great personal triumph yesterday. . . . He completely vindicated to the satisfaction of a crowded and excited House the essential soundness in its broad principles of the scheme he has devised and championed for the closer union of the Allies, and therefore for the better conduct of the War. Mr. Asquith, who opened the debate, carefully marshalled the familiar objections to the Rapallo plan and the obvious criticisms upon the Paris speech. But his reasoning was confined to secondary points. He never for a moment grappled with its leading features or ventured to contest the principles on which it rests. . . .”

\* Mr. Pringle also in the course of this speech predicted that I should be making an exactly similar speech 12 months from that date. The armistice was signed a week before the term of the prophecy had expired.



Now that the organised attack on the project for an Inter-Allied War Council had thus conspicuously collapsed, the path was clear for the setting up of the new Machinery.

Why did the Government concentrate on Unity of Strategy rather than on Unity of Command?

Unity of Command had already been attempted in this year's campaign on the Western Front. In the spring offensive the combined French and British attack had been placed under the general control of General Nivelle. In the Flanders offensive the French contingent was under the direction of Sir Douglas Haig. In neither operation did the arrangement work satisfactorily. In the first the explanation is largely personal. The two commanders did not hit it off—consequent lack of zeal on one side and of tact on the other led to misunderstandings, and misunderstandings to delays, where rapidity of action was of the essence of the strategy. Whatever the reasons might be, in neither offensive was there any unity or agreement on policy. The result was that, although there was apparent co-operation, it was not real and whole-hearted in either case. Thus Unity of Command was for the time being discredited by the failure of the two experiments made in 1917—one with a French *Generalissimo* and the other with a British. They failed, partly because there was no joint Staff to work out the basis of united action.

The first step in the attainment of Unity of Commandment was to secure real agreement on strategy and to have an Inter-Allied Staff directly responsible to the Commander-in-Chief, which would not be thwarted by the Staffs attached to and dependent upon the ideas of the Commander-in-Chief of each national army.

A genuine Unity of Command was ultimately evolved out of this move. Even then, so great were the prejudices to be overcome, it had to be achieved by two separate steps and as a necessity arising out of the consequences of overwhelming disaster. At Doullens, Foch was called upon to "co-ordinate" the effort of the two armies. But he was not given the authority to command. That did not constitute a United Leadership and in practice it failed to achieve one Common Direction. Unity of Command was only established later on at Beauvais, where Foch was made *Général-en-Chef* of the two armies. But Versailles was the first step; Doullens was the second; Beauvais was the final achievement of Allied Unity on the Western Front.

When a Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies on the Western Front came to be appointed, he had behind him the ablest Staff in the field, which he could always call upon to assist him in developing his plans. His orders could not therefore be delayed or frustrated if any individual General under his Command proved refractory and interposed obstacles on questions of detail, as Haig and Robertson did in the Nivelle enterprise. Thus Versailles assured the success of the Beauvais decision.

## CHAPTER LXVIII

### SUMMARY AND RESULTS OF 1917 CAMPAIGN

WHAT was the net result of the fourth campaign in this world struggle of infuriated nations? At the end of it some of them were prostrate and never rose again to continue the fight. Others were staggering in the ring. Even those who stood firmly on their feet and were able still to hit reeling blows were gashed with wounds and visibly becoming exhausted from loss of blood. The Allied group sought to gain the ascendancy by two general methods. For one the military chiefs were responsible. The other was left to the Navy and the civil Administration. The military idea was to force an immediate decision by hitting with the whole strength of their armies at the most formidable but least vulnerable parts in the enemy's defensive system: the Governments had to ensure that, if these onslaughts failed to take effect, the reserve of national power should be sustained and stimulated, so that it might outlast that of their adversaries. In the prosecution of the first aim of this double policy the Western Allies undertook tremendous attacks on the German entrenchments in France, Flanders and Italy with a view to breaking through their defences and defeating the most redoubtable enemy of the Alliance. In pursuit of the second aim of this common war policy the Allies took steps to strengthen their position in respect of food and war materials whilst tightening the blockade on the enemy countries in order to weaken their striking power. In both the blockading of the enemy and the organisation of the national resources Britain took the lead. The blockade at sea became more ruthless than ever and the enemy countries felt its stranglehold telling on their vitality. The British Government by a series of unprecedented measures led the way in a reorganisation of the national assets in man-power, in food production and distribution, and in transport. The Government proceeded on the assumption that the Allies had been manœuvred, by the improvident and shortsighted war direction hitherto adopted, into a position where the issue had become mainly a question of staying power. Hence the gigantic efforts put forth during this year in the development and mobilisation of all the available resources of our country.

As to the Central Powers, they gave up any idea of attempting to force a decision this year by a great military coup against the most

powerful of their surviving enemies. They had practically shattered the military strength of four of the nations in battle array against them before the end of 1916. By the end of this year they had almost completed their overthrow and had also broken the battle front of another of their foes. As to the French and British Armies, Germany was content to repel their assaults on her fortifications. Her deadliest effort to overcome the Allies and compel them to sue for peace was made not on land but at sea. Ultimate victory or defeat depended on the success or failure of that effort. She attacked Britain, which was now the most resourceful of her remaining foes in Europe, by a well-organised and devastating campaign to sink her shipping. Had she succeeded, the Allied countries, their people, and their armies would have been at her mercy and 1918 would have witnessed the greatest military and naval triumph in the history of the Teuton.

Time was on the side of the Allies. This year was Germany's last chance to win, for America would be in next year. Germany, therefore, had this year either to defeat the Allied Armies or destroy the means of transporting war material, food and reinforcements whether from America or the British Empire.

Each of the belligerents endeavoured to handle against their opponents the grim weapon of famine. If the War went right on through 1918, stark hunger would drive the population and armies of one or other of the two rival groups into surrender. Which of them would starve first?

Those were the problems of 1917. How did it all work out? There were victories on both sides and also defeats and disappointments. There can be no doubt that by 31st December the balance of advantage was decisively on the Allied side. In a war of this kind, where fighting was by no means the only factor in decisive victory, organisation behind the lines ultimately determined the event. But so far as actual blows were concerned the history of 1917 is one of our winning the War on sea in spite of the Board of Admiralty, whilst our Generals were doing their best to lose the War on land in spite of the Government. The sea campaign went in our favour decisively—and that determined the final issue of the struggle. The land campaign went definitely against us—and that jeopardised the advantage gained by the efforts of our fine seamen and our great organisers and also enormously increased the cost in life and treasure of our final triumph.

The fighting on land in 1917 went heavily in favour of the Central Powers. It is impossible for any impartial observer of the events of 1917 to come to any other conclusion. The military chiefs had already in the winter of 1916 planned their campaigns for 1917 on the same rigid and arid lines as they had pursued in 1915 and 1916, achieving nothing but a horrifying carnage unparalleled in the annals of war. This time they felt certain that their one great idea must



succeed at last. They had made a few changes and improvements to correct little mistakes they had discovered last time in the action of their great plan. Moreover, they were confident that the German troops had deteriorated in quality since last year. So first the French were to conduct a great hurtling offensive with masses of their troops on a wide front, with the help of a diverting attack in the north by the British on a narrower front. Then if these operations did not finally succeed in driving the German Army out of their entrenchments, the British Army were to undertake another attack, and propel hundreds of thousands of their best troops against the German fortresses in Flanders in order to expel the Germans from the Flemish coast, and then fall on their exposed flank with masses of cavalry. It was all based on the dynamics of the butting head against a tremendous wall—in this case a wall bristling with machine-guns. It is only fair to the military intelligence to state that the British were not enamoured of the French plan, and the French were at first quite indifferent and eventually contemptuous of the British project. Haig did not believe in the Nivelle strategy and Pétain and Foch scoffed at Haig's "duck march" in Flanders. They judged wisely of each other's plans if not of their own. That is a common attribute in all human affairs. They nevertheless agreed, in that spirit of fraternal toleration and accommodation that ought to prevail amongst partners, to try both—in turn. Neither of the two schemes had a reasonable chance of succeeding, for reasons which I gave before they were ever attempted. But the military staffs clutched at their respective projects. With fierce tenacity they stubbornly refused to let go, and declined angrily even to consider any alternative. Italy was left to her own devices. What was worse, she was left to carry them out with what was obviously—even to civilians—an inadequate equipment. Russia was entrusted with tasks which she was no longer fitted to discharge. Every front where there was any chance of obtaining a signal victory which would have threatened the security of the Central Powers was treated as a "side-show."

The mildewed strategic ideas that had wasted away the large margin of advantage in resources and chances that once appertained to the Alliance, had once more been furbished up and presented as fresh projects of action at Chantilly and endorsed by all the Allied Governments at Paris in November, 1916. These schemes were left to the new British Government as a legacy of inevitable disaster. The tragedy of the year's land struggle lay in the fact that the Allied Governments could not arrive at an agreement amongst themselves to insist on new methods being considered. The efforts of the British Government to alter these schemes were rendered ineffectual owing to the resistance or inertia of the other Allied Governments. France only changed her mind about the butting strategy after the Nivelle defeat had almost destroyed what was left of her fine army, that is,

what was left after the Joffre-Nivelle tactics had worked their will on the great army of France for two and a half years. But even after the French command had finally thrown over the old strategy there was no agreement between the Allied Staffs as to what should be substituted. An alliance between independent political parties for effective joint action to attain a common aim is difficult enough to achieve and still more difficult to work satisfactorily, but when it is attempted between independent nations it is a baffling proposition and often unattainable. The great offensive designed at Chantilly in November, 1916, had therefore to be laboriously plodded through at a ruinous cost, without reference to any exposure of basic assumptions by events, or to any complete alteration which had been effected by these events in strategic conditions.

Each army, French, British and Italian, in its turn was forced to stop through sheer exhaustion. Russia and Roumania had already been finally defeated by the end of 1916. The Russian soldiers as well as the Russian people had both had enough of the fighting. That means they were thoroughly beaten and knew it. To continue in the War meant useless slaughter. Desperate efforts were made by the Duma leaders and by Kerensky once more to rouse and revive the combative spirit of the Army. It was all in vain. A great offensive was staged in the summer. But you cannot attack effectively with an army which has already given up all hope of winning. Once this offensive had definitely failed—as it soon did—the Russian Army ceased to be a serious menace to the Central Powers. Their military and political leaders had only to consider whether it was better to go forward and push over the crazy fabric, or allow it to disintegrate and crumble. The latter process was steadily and perceptibly going on. The cords which just held the military power of Russia together were rotting before our eyes owing to the corrosive elements with which they were drenched by revolutionary propaganda. The Russian and Roumanian defeat transferred the favourable balance of man-power immediately available, from the Allies to the Central Powers. American man-power was not a military factor in 1917. Pétain and Foch grasped the change in the military situation due to the paralysis of one Ally with its immense army, and the accession of another great country with a great army not in being, but only in the making. They also realised that the temporary collapse in the spirit of the French troops caused by the slaughter of the Chemin des Dames was an element with which they must reckon. Haig and Robertson went on as if there had been no alteration in the fundamental facts that determined strategy. Every time the altered circumstances were urged upon them they treated them as irrelevancies. What mattered to them was that the French Generals had been given their chance and had missed it, and that the British Generals must not now be robbed of theirs. They meant to have

it and show the French how to use it. But frankly on this subject the Government was so divided that it could not overrule its military experts. They were fully aware of that division and took full advantage of the circumstance to stick to their plan. We know what a ghastly fiasco it all turned out to be.

The Eastern Allies had been for all practical purposes finally overthrown and France, Britain and Italy had all of them done badly on the Western Front—from the North Sea to the Adriatic. The spring and autumn offensives captured some ground and a number of prisoners and guns, but in substance they both failed conspicuously in their objectives. The losses in officers and men were much heavier amongst the Allied Armies than those they succeeded in inflicting on the Germans. In morale the French Army was reduced to a condition in which it could not be trusted to do any sustained fighting on a great scale. We had yet to discover how seriously the spirit of the British troops had been shaken by the Flanders offensive. The German Army still maintained its offensive intrepidity. On the Italian Front opportunities were thrown away and passed on gratuitously to the enemy. It is lucky that it was rather late in the season when he took advantage of his chances on that front. The early summer offensive of the Italian Army achieved nothing owing to lack of guns and ammunition which their Western Allies could easily have spared. The effort made by the British Government at the Rome Conference subsequently to help the Italians to what would have been an assured and probably a decisive victory, was frustrated by military obtuseness and selfishness. The disastrous rout of Caporetto was the inevitable climax of such narrow strategy. Hundreds of thousands of Italian troops were put out of action and thousands of guns were lost. The offensive power and spirit of the Army were not restored during the rest of the War. On the Salonika Front the elaborate show of an Allied offensive was a prearranged fiasco. The British and French troops there were deliberately deprived by their respective General Staffs at home of the artillery and ammunition which alone could have enabled them to smash through the obstacles with which the infantry were confronted. It was a sham, a preordained sham, but a costly sham, and after this experience there was no heart left either in Generals or men for further fighting on that front. Thus in the East and the West the war of attrition in men, in guns, in territory, and in morale had gone emphatically in favour of the Central Powers. They claimed that their armies were victorious on all European Fronts, and their claim could not be challenged.

The only bright spots in the military campaign were the genuine victories won in the Far East and the clearing of the Germans out of East Africa. The progress made in these spheres was due to the direct intervention and insistence of the Government. The defeat



of the hitherto victorious Turkish Armies in Palestine and Mesopotamia and the occupation of the world-famous cities of Jerusalem and Baghdad were a patch of blue sky which lightened the gloom that hung over the battlefield as a whole. The psychological effect—and that counts in war—was immense. The name of Baghdad counted for more throughout the Mussulman world than did Passchendaele with all the notoriety it had acquired. Jerusalem meant more to hundreds of millions—Christian and Mussulman alike—than Ostend. The calling of the Turkish bluff was not only the beginning of the cracking-up of that military impostorship which the incompetence of our war direction had permitted to intimidate us for years; it was itself a real contribution to ultimate victory. The encouragement it gave to the Allies at a moment of depression was useful, but the decided blow it gave to German prestige amongst their confederates was of still greater service. It was the first time the Germans exposed to their Allies their utter inability to give them effective aid in defeat when they were at last intelligently and resolutely attacked, and to protect them from impending disaster. It made a definite impression on the Turkish mind, and it was not without its influence on Bulgaria—probably also on Austria.

Field-Marshal von Hindenburg in his autobiography bears out the impression which the loss of Baghdad made both in Germany and amongst her Allies. He says:—

“The loss of Baghdad was painful to us, and as we well believed, still more for all thinking Turkey. How often had the name of the old city of the Caliphs been mentioned in Germany in previous years. . . . We had guaranteed the Turkish Government its territorial integrity of the Empire, and we felt that, in spite of the generous interpretation of this contract, our political account was heavily overdrawn by this new great loss.”

So much for the charge that the British Government were wasting our resources on useless side-shows. No wonder Hindenburg, in discussing the weakness of the military position of the Turkish Empire beyond the Taurus, and our failure to take advantage of it says:—

“If ever there was a prospect of a brilliant strategic feat, it was here. . . . Why did England never make use of her opportunity? . . . Some day history will perhaps clear up this question also.”\*

There were three other events which were of good omen for the future. The first was the setting-up of the Inter-Allied Military and Naval Staff at Versailles. This was a completely new departure.

\* “Out of My Life,” Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, p. 295 *et seq.*

Its object was to put an end to the disjointed and haphazard methods of particularist strategy which had prevailed hitherto. For the first time in the War the mere pretence of unity of action was to be discarded, and a genuine effort was to be made to consider the vast battlefield as one front with several flanks, to survey and assess the opportunities and possibilities not only of each flank, but of the whole front on sea and land, and adjust the general strategy of the Allies accordingly. There was now sitting at Versailles a body of very able Generals from each Allied country and assisted by a brilliant staff of experienced officers drawn from each Allied Army. They were engaged in making a thorough study of the position and prospect on all the fronts. They had placed at their disposal all the information gathered by the staff of each Allied Army and Navy. The process of examination and co-ordination was going on.

The second was the demonstration at the Battle of Cambrai of the great possibilities of the tank in trench warfare. This action was grossly bungled and the tank success was thrown away through the ineptitude of the High Command. Nevertheless, the tank attack showed clearly what an effective use could be made of these machines in overcoming the most formidable entanglements and entrenchments. This discovery was one of the principal factors in the German defeat of 1918. Stimulated by the knowledge gained at Cambrai the efforts made to manufacture more and more of these weapons of offensive warfare were redoubled and, profiting by the mistakes made, new methods were devised for using them to the best advantage.

When I was Secretary of State for War in September, 1916, I ordered 1,000 tanks to be manufactured. Sir William Robertson countermanded the order without my knowledge. Thanks to Sir Albert Stern, I discovered this countermand in time, and gave peremptory instructions that the manufacture should be proceeded with and that the utmost diligence should be used in executing the order. We had now a large fleet of these land battleships already completed and many more in course of construction.

But infinitely the greatest warranty of victory which came to the Allied side—apart from the defeat of the submarine—was the accession of the great Western Republic to the Allied side. I place it second to the checking of the havoc of the submarines, because if the U-boats had triumphed in their purpose no American forces of any magnitude could have reached the battlefield. But once a safe passage across the Atlantic was ensured, America with her enormous resources in men, money and material was bound to have a decisive influence on the fortunes of the War. The Russian strength had dwindled from campaign to campaign. The American would grow as time went on. In a war of exhaustion which had already lasted three years America, coming in fresh with

her mighty strength untouched, would be a determining factor provided her power could be brought into action before the Allies cracked. The reorganisation of the resources and energies of the British Empire carried the Allies over the interregnum between the American declaration of war and American readiness for war. The discomfiture of the submarines by British marines enabled that readiness to be made effective before it was too late to profit by it.

This leads us to the only decisive triumphs of the 1917 campaign.

Although as a whole things had not gone well on land where the military staffs had their way, the whole situation had been redeemed by our victories at sea, where the experts were overruled by the Government. In addition to this our reorganisation of the home front by the business men called in by the Government had an enormous effect in strengthening our prospects of endurance in the war of attrition to which we had been committed. Had it not been for these activities it is doubtful whether the Alliance could have stayed the course.

The part played by our sailors in gaining ultimate victory for the Alliance has not been sufficiently acknowledged. Even British histories accord infinitely more space to battles that did not get us any nearer a decision and ended in nothing but heavy losses. The conflict at sea was not one of a kind which lent itself to diurnal publicity. For that reason not even a paragraph could be accorded to the achievements of our sailors in the daily Press. There were no special correspondents in the vicinity to describe the unceasing conflict waged daily and nightly on the trenchless sea—a conflict on which the fate of great nations hung. Even the British public with its traditional understanding of the importance of sea-power had no clear conception of the predominant influence which these individual manœuvres and fights, enacted where the visibility was not clear to the eyes of the most discerning journalist, were having in determining the question of final victory or defeat. Some of the British histories and memoirs of the War show no clear apprehension of the importance of the struggle for mastery on the High Seas. The Dogger Bank, the Dardanelles bombardment, the Falkland fight and Jutland are given a prominent place. They were spectacular, but these battles constituted a small part in the prolonged struggle which determined the issue. French and Italian histories ignore almost altogether the maritime contests that pulled them through in the end. The details of the struggle were rightly kept secret at the time, and yet in the aggregate these individual deeds of sustained courage and skill won the War.

The real conflict resolved itself into many occasional combats, but more often into manœuvres to escape attack. There were a myriad heroic incidents and episodes, none of them reported, where only a handful of men were engaged at a time. The story as a whole is the



greatest epic in our history, but each line was composed separately by different men at diverse times. The battle on land was pyrotechnic—and therefore made good copy. A convoy of tramps gave a thrill when you saw it, but there was none of the shuddering drama of the great tragedies enacted on land. Here thousands of great cannon were firing millions of shells until the reverberations could be heard across the Channel by multitudes well within our shores: masses of men dashing along in the face of shot and shell: here was indeed the lightning and thunder of war: crowded hospitals scattered all over the land advertised the immensity of the devastation: and yet nothing happened that finally determined the event of the War. Even the air bombing of London and the destruction of a few Zeppelins attracted more attention than the silent fight with the U-boats. During the night whilst London, with its teeming millions, was stricken with nervous fear by the throbbing sound of German aeroplanes hovering in the moonlit sky and by the thud of the explosive bombs they dropped on the darkened city, a number of humble steamers would be navigating in formation, escorted by two or three torpedo boats flitting around to watch over their flock like faithful shepherd dogs. It was almost a noiseless procession, whose movement was not heard above the breaking of the waves or the sigh of the winds. The enemy was hidden under the waters. He might be waiting for the heavy-laden pack horses of the sea—the tramp steamers—to hurl his crashing torpedo at the unresisting plates. One detonation and a ship disappeared in the deep. The noisy land battle and the exciting air raid occupied pages of the morning paper. The struggle at sea, of which not a sound reached the shore or any ear remotely connected with Fleet Street, passed without any detailed notice being taken of it, because of the details nothing was ever heard by the public. The wolves that prowled through the jungles of the deep were more of a peril to the great city, its pride and its people, than the clattering menace of the clouds. And yet the latter had no influence whatever on the course of the War, whereas the former was an essential part of the process that settled it.

It had become a war of endurance. The strategy on both sides was unimaginative and commonplace. There was no military genius on either side to devise, execute and exploit a stroke that transformed the course of the War and determined the result. Castelnau's penetrating observation about Napoleon still held good. "Had he been here he would have thought of the something else." No General had yet discovered it. It was therefore entirely a question of which combination would be the first to get tired of the War, and to fall from exhaustion or retire because unnourished nerves could stand the strain no longer. Here the command of the sea became the dominant factor. A half-starved Britain and France

would inevitably have followed a hunger-stricken Russia. Had the submarines succeeded, then by the end of 1917 the Allied populations would have been fortunate to secure half-rations. The soldiers would also have had their food allowance reduced. Coupled with the discouragement and losses of the land campaign, the withdrawal of the Russian colossus, the dwindling chance of carrying American troops to Europe, the effect of the Russian Revolution on the working class would have been intensified a hundredfold, and no Government could have hoped to carry their ill-fed people and their stunted and shrinking armies through another campaign.

The unmistakable success of the anti-submarine measures taken by the Government—taken as far as the maritime arrangements were concerned, against the advice of their chief naval experts—changed the whole situation. These measures included a great shipbuilding programme, a complete reorganisation of our shipping, our docks, our rail transport and the resources of our soil. There was also a mobilisation of the whole adult population with a view to a more efficacious use of the labour reserves of the nation. Tonnage was saved by diminishing the sinking and increasing the building—by making a more businesslike use of the available ships—by cutting down non-essential imports and by a great programme of increased home production. Our imports of essential supplies, war material and food were maintained—our home yield of food, timber and ore was substantially increased. There were restrictions on consumption, but they did not deprive the nation of sufficient food to provide nourishment for all. The apprehension that we would not be able to reinforce, feed and equip the armies of the Alliance, that we might not be in a position to transport the huge American Army across the seas and that we might not be able to keep our population from starvation, vanished altogether like a bad dream. The disaffection which threatened trouble early in the year gradually disappeared and by the end of December it was giving the Government no anxiety. Before 1918 arrived we knew that we must win if we could constrain the High Command not to repeat the prodigious military errors of 1917.

What was the state of things in enemy countries? The food shortage was becoming acute. It was telling on the physique of the population, and consequently on its temper. The food deficiency was causing a sense of general irritation amongst the industrial population whose zealous co-operation was so essential in the mines and works. The difference between the frame of mind of the German worker and that of his opposite number in Britain and France will be better appreciated when one recalls that a resolution demanding that an effort should be made to negotiate peace was carried by an overwhelming majority in the Reichstag, but rejected by an even larger majority in both the British Parliament and the

French Chamber of Deputies. The bulletins issued to the enemy public about German victories in France, Russia and Roumania although in substance authentic, did not appease the cravings of incipient and unsatisfied hunger amongst those who returned the German deputies. Even the soldiers in the trenches were becoming increasingly conscious of the fact that the blockade was tightening. As long as the submarine campaign was thriving and the figures of ships sunk were swelling week by week, the suffering inhabitants of the Central Alliance felt that the enemy who stopped their supplies would soon be in a worse plight than their own, and that they would be starved into submission before German and Austrian cupboards became quite bare. That prevented disaffection from fermenting into revolution. Even by the end of the year they had still hopes of the submarine. The check which had been put on its ravages had not been generally realised in Germany. A time was coming when it could not be concealed. Then any nation, however brave, would know that it was useless to continue the struggle. All would depend on the German Admiralty finding some means of circumventing the new methods successfully applied by the British Government for the protection of their ships. So far the British were winning in the tremendous conflict going on by day and by night in this decisive sphere of action. That is why I regard the success of the steps taken to counter the submarine attack as the most important contribution made to victory during the year 1917.



## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER LXIII.—I

*Memorandum by Sir William Robertson,*

*20th June, 1917.*

1. I HAVE not attended most of the recent meetings of the Cabinet Committee on War Policy, but I understand that, amongst other things, they are considering whether, unless success in the North can be practically guaranteed, we ought not to abandon the plan now being carried out by the *War Cabinet instructions*,\* in order to reserve our men for next year, and meanwhile send a large amount of artillery to Italy in the hope of defeating Austria.

2. Personally, I have been sceptical of Austria making a separate peace, as her whole future depends upon her relations with Germany to whose wheels she is tied in a variety of ways, economic, industrial, political, etc. Assuming, however, that she would make a separate peace if fairly *heavily punished*, the question is *can she be so punished?*

3. In the recent Italian offensive a fairly important advance was made on one flank and a smaller one on the other. The losses on both sides appear to be approximately equal. The Austrians fought well and showed no sign of collapse and have, in fact, taken back some of the ground they lost.

4. It would, of course, be a great advantage if we could completely dispose of Austria, but Germany knows this as well as we do and she may be depended upon to try and support Austria, if and when she is in danger, in the same way as she did in the Bukowina.

5. I understand that the dispatch of some 75 batteries of heavy artillery from our front in France to Italy is being considered. *The time required to withdraw these batteries and get them ready for battle there would probably not be less than six weeks.* The passage of this number of guns through Italy *could not be concealed* and the enemy might be expected to have the best part of a month for counter-preparations.† I have many times pointed out the advantages enjoyed by the enemy in having the interior position, which enables him to move his troops more quickly than we can move ours. We have but two railways into Italy, one of which—the

\* As I have pointed out already, no such "instructions" were ever issued.—D.L.L.G.

† Our military representative at the Italian Front, General Delmé-Radcliffe, was of opinion that guns and ammunition could be transferred to the Italian Front without attracting the attention of the enemy.

Mont Cenis—is not very good, whereas the enemy has five—one leading to the Trentino and four to the Isonzo. The enemy can therefore always hope to beat us, if he wishes to, in concentrating superior forces on the Italian Front.

6. As regards the number of troops Germany might send to Italy, General Cadorna stated on the 14th March last, i.e. before the Russian Revolution, that if the Germans decided to attack Italy they could with the Austrians bring 90 divisions and a very superior artillery against him. These reinforcements would, he said, be so overwhelming that he would need reinforcements from us in order to enable him to defend himself.

The Allied offensive on the Western Front has prevented the Germans from undertaking any offensive operations in Italy. If Germany is relieved from serious pressure on the Western Front she will be in much the same position for attacking Italy as she was last March, but plus the advantage she may get from the weakening of the Russians, and therefore, if she decided to reinforce the Italian Front to the extent regarded as possible by Cadorna, not only could he not defeat Austria but he himself would need support.

7. So much for the prospect of Austria being defeated. As regards our position, if the 75 batteries were sent *we must necessarily pass to the defensive for all practical purposes,\** and be prepared to suffer losses similar to those suffered by the Germans while on the defensive this summer. *Also, we abandon all hope of making either our air or sea situation more secure so far as the Belgian coast is concerned, and, in fact, the Germans might conquer us by an attempt to take Dunkirk,* and if they succeeded the situation would become even worse than it is now. I do not say that they would succeed, as this would depend to some extent upon the reinforcements that Germany might be able to bring over from the Russian Front and upon the power of her artillery. *This power has not been great recently,* and as the number of heavy guns she has on the Western Front are approximately equal to the Allies, her failure must be due to other reasons—for instance, the declining morale, inferiority in the air, inefficient employment of the guns, or want of ammunition. I do not pretend to say which; it may be a combination of all. But as a shortage of ammunition has been alleged I would point out that if left to her own devices Germany might be able to accumulate a sufficient stock for offensive purposes. *I think we should follow the principle of the gambler who has the heaviest purse and force our adversary's hand and make him go on spending until he is a pauper.* As a matter of fact, we are not very sure about this shortage of ammunition. Von-Arnim commands the Fourth Army in the North opposite the Belgians where a small amount of ammunition would suffice, while all that could be made

\* This is an assumption that Germans attack, i.e. do not take their men to Italy.  
—D.L.L.G.

available may have been sent to Arras and Champagne where heavy fighting was in progress at the time he issued his order.

8. Germany would bring over heavy reinforcements if Russia continues to do nothing or if she drops out of the War altogether. The best chance we have of keeping her in the field is to continue our activity, *for if we stop being aggressive she may think that we admit our failures.* Further, the Russians are themselves supposed to be preparing for an offensive early next month and have asked us to keep up our pressure.

9. The conclusion I have arrived at, taking the broadest possible view of the general situation, is that our chances of obtaining good results are certainly no greater in Italy than they are in the North, while the risks involved are much greater in the former place than in the latter. *I deprecate as strongly as anyone our incurring heavy casualties without a corresponding return,* BUT THE PLAN AS OUTLINED BY THE FIELD-MARSHAL SHOULD SECURE US AGAINST THIS MISTAKE. *I have shown, and I understand the War Cabinet agree, that we must continue to be aggressive somewhere on our front, and we ought of course to do this in the most promising direction.* The plan provides for this and will enable us to derive a real advantage till the enemy shows signs of weakening, *while at the same time it permits of our easing off if the situation so demands.* No doubt the enemy will fight as hard as he possibly can, and he will use as many troops and guns as he possibly can, but he will also do these things on the Italian Front rather than see Austria decisively defeated. I do not for one moment think that Germany is as yet near the end of her resources in men or material. I think she may yet take a great deal of beating, and that it is necessary France should be aggressive as well as ourselves. On the other hand, Germany may be much nearer exhaustion both on the fronts and at home, than we imagine, and there are many indications of this. Doubtful situations such as the present one have always arisen in war, *and great mistakes have been made by endeavouring to find a fresh way round as soon as the strain begins to be felt.\** *We should be on our guard against this mistake.*

10. I am therefore in favour of continuing our present plan on the chance of getting a success in the north, not only because of the military situation but also because of the necessity of trying to improve the air and sea situation, and I am consequently averse from diverting any of our resources to Italy. We should, however, do all we can to provide Italy with means for increasing her ammunition supply, as she already has far more guns than she can keep employed, and in this connection I would remind the War Cabinet that there is no reason why Italy should remain inactive throughout the winter, as operations can continue on the Isonzo up to the end of January.

\* Where? Scipio—Sherman—Wellington.



## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER LXIII.—II

*Memorandum by Sir Douglas Haig on the strategical situation with special reference to the comparative advantages of an offensive in Northern Belgium as against an offensive from Italy against Austria.*

THE railway capacity of Northern Belgium is sufficient for the maintenance of some 40 German divisions north of the river Lys and possibly even more.

But given our present superiority in the air, we could almost certainly cause such serious interruptions and consequent disorganisation in the railway working (by bombing important junctions) as to upset all calculations.

In any case the limiting factor may be taken as the number of German divisions available rather than as a question of railway capacity.

On the 17th June, Germany had 156 divisions on the Western Front. Of these, 25 were in the army entrusted with the defence of Northern Belgium, leaving 131 for the defence of the remainder of the German line.

Of this 131, 96 are in line and 35 in reserve.

Judging by past experience of her methods, Germany would not reduce this number of 96 in line, opposed as they are by a considerably larger allied force (at present about 140 divisions). She must also retain her reserves behind them.

Of the 96 divisions in line, not less than 63 have been seriously engaged lately, and of the 35 in reserve, 25 have been seriously engaged, so that, of the 131 divisions available for defence on the long front (roughly 400 miles) from the Lys to Switzerland, only 43 are fresh.

The present allotment works out at over three miles of front per division for the whole front south of the Lys—which may be taken as a minimum for reasonable security, especially as German divisions have a low establishment and as no less than 17 Landwehr divisions of comparatively poor quality are included in the figures given.

It is highly improbable therefore, that the Germans would reduce appreciably the 131 divisions available on this front.

Of the 25 divisions allotted to the German Army garrisoning Northern Belgium, 13 are in line between the Lys and the sea,

a distance of 32 miles, of which 13 are protected by flood. The number of divisions in reserve in this army is 11, all of which could be made available north of the Lys. This is a high allotment for this area even allowing for the fact that it includes the coast garrisons.

One division in line to about two miles of front on which attack is expected is as much as we need expect to be employed against us; and, allowing for the flooded area, 14 or 15 divisions may be taken as the largest force that will be placed in line between the Lys and the sea. The reserves at first available behind that front are unlikely—for the reasons given above—to exceed ten divisions, and there may be two or three divisions in addition placed on the coast itself.

If fresh divisions can be brought from Russia we may confidently expect them to be centrally placed, at some distance back, until the situation is clear; or they may be used to relieve exhausted divisions at special points, the latter being drawn into central reserves.

At present, Germany's reduction of her forces on the Russian Front is practically limited to exchanging fresh troops there for tired ones from the West. *But the number of her good divisions in the East is limited and moreover, it is estimated that her transport facilities will only suffice to move ten divisions a month from the East.*

*For all these reasons we are justified in calculating that the Allies will have a considerable superiority in infantry on the front of attack—probably not less than two to one. And our capacity for exchanging tired divisions for fresh ones along our defensive line will not be less than that of the Germans.*

In guns and ammunition, judging by experience and information from captured orders, etc., our superiority will be even greater; while in the air we may regard our superiority as still more assured. The last mentioned factor is of immense importance from the points of view of artillery efficiency, information, damage behind the enemy's lines, and general morale.

As regards the alternative to an attack in Belgium, namely, attacking Austria from Italy, the arguments against this are overwhelmingly stronger than those in favour of it.

*It has always been accepted as the most effective form of war to attack and destroy the enemy's strongest forces as soon as possible IF THERE IS A REASONABLE PROSPECT OF SUCCESS. If there is not a reasonable prospect of success the next best course is to weaken the enemy by holding his main forces and attacking his weaker ones, if that be possible. The possibility depends, however, firstly on being able to hold his main forces, and secondly, on being able to defeat his weaker ones.*

If we were to detach largely to Italy it is probable that we could still hold the Germans on the Western Front, *but it is not certain and it would depend much on the French.*

It is at best very uncertain that we could defeat Austria.

If the Germans elected to send divisions round to meet us on the Italian frontier, their railway facilities are better than ours *in the proportion of five to two*; and as it is Germany's interest to uphold Austria just as much as it is ours to overcome Austria, it is practically certain that she would endeavour to do so either by attacking the French violently, or by transferring divisions to the Italian Front.

The Italian frontier is difficult to attack from. It would take us so long to transfer troops and prepare an attack that it is doubtful if we could complete preparations this summer.\* *The main part of the forces employed in the attack would be Italian*, and even if the Allied offensive gained some success at first, Germany's reply might be to counter-attack the Italians as soon as possible. If they gave way our force might—and probably would—be seriously compromised. The danger of this would be far greater than the danger of any counter-attack against our offensive in Belgium, where all the troops employed in our offensive will be trustworthy.

*A decision to transfer troops to Italy would mean abandonment of our offensive in Belgium. A consequent gain of time to Germany; very dangerous disappointment in France and to some extent in Russia; small prospects of success against Austria supported in all probability by German troops; a possibility of reverses on the Western Front; and a possibility of still more serious reverses on the Italian Front.*

*Against all this we have a reasonable chance of success in Belgium which may have greater results than even a bigger success against Austria, and which at least may be expected to open the way for greater results subsequently.*

It is not impossible that Germany aims at inducing us to detach from the Western Front—that is a very usual form of war, often employed with telling effect. But whether she is deliberately trying so to induce us or not, there seems no doubt that our wisest and soundest course is to continue to wear down the German forces on the Western Front, as we are undoubtedly able to do.

\* The Germans prepared the attack which broke through the Italian Army some weeks later than this date.



## CHAPTER LXIX

### OUTLOOK FOR 1918

THE federated nations were now facing their fifth campaign. They were all exhausted and all disillusioned. The war fever had burnt itself out long ago in every warring country. Enthusiasms had cooled down. There were no more patriotic demonstrations in the streets. Ours was the only country where anti-War organisations were allowed to pursue their activities and to organise public meetings. Even amongst the supporters of the War there was a deep and silent prayer that it would come to an end soon. But nowhere except in Russia was there any indication that the belligerent peoples were ready to give in. The struggle was kept going by that stubborn determination not to turn tail which keeps brave animals fighting as long as they can stand.

A superficial review of the appearance of the vast battlefield as a whole would lead to the conclusion that the Central Powers were winning. Serbia and Belgium were almost entirely in their hands. The greater part of Roumania was occupied by their troops. The Russian armies had ceased to exist as a fighting force and were rapidly disintegrating into a mutinous rabble. The heroic if unintelligent and ill co-ordinated efforts put forth in 1917 by the armies of France and Britain to drive the Germans out of Belgium and the occupied territories of France had been sanguinary failures. So shattering had been the French repulse that it had temporarily destroyed the morale and undermined the discipline of their fine army, and, since the defeat of April, 1917, French troops could not be relied upon for any operation that involved sustained attack on a great scale. It was not certain that after a year's rest and recuperation French soldiers could be depended upon for a campaign which would involve the only kind of effort which could hope to break through the German defence. General Pétain was for concentrating on defence in 1918 and postponing the final offensive until 1919. He reckoned that by 1919 the Americans would be ready with an army that would give the Allies that overwhelming strength which would enable them to overcome the resistance of an enemy worn out by five campaigns. As to the British Army, it kept on fighting doggedly right into the December mists, but it was tired and without confidence in the wisdom of the leadership which was responsible for the stupid and squalid strategy of the

last two months of Passchendaele, and for the egregious muddle which threw away the great opportunities of Cambrai.

The unsuccessful and costly offensives of 1915-16-17 had impaired the Allied strength and efficiency in two directions: —

1. They wasted the best man-power of the Allied Nations without either attaining any strategic advantage or inflicting corresponding, let alone greater, losses on the enemy. In these battles, as a whole, the Allies lost three men for every two who fell on the German side. Every one of these futile offensives thus reduced substantially the superiority in effective man-power which the Allies possessed at the commencement of the War. The irreparable losses amongst experienced officers and N.C.O.'s were much heavier in the French and British Armies than on the side of the enemy. This increased the weight of the adverse balance of casualties.

2. The British Army, which in June was the most formidable force on the Allied side, had fought incessantly from March up to the first week in December a series of terrible battles without achieving any strategic results. These sanguinary attacks had succeeded, with excessive losses, in creating two fresh salients which were admitted by G.H.Q. to be untenable. That is, the ghastly sacrifices of our fine Army had increased the strategic advantages of the enemy. The Expeditionary Force was weary in body and spirit. To quote the words of the French Official History of the War: —

“It was manifest now at the beginning of winter that the English Army was passing through a phase of weariness, a consequence of the substantial and sustained efforts put up throughout the summer; it was at length beginning to experience the gravest difficulty in reconstituting its forces; in mid-December, its infantry showed a deficit of 116,000 men.”\*

Haig talked about “the fatigue of his forces”; he alluded to them as his “weary and depleted units,” pleaded that “having been engaged on the offensive since the spring” his army had been unable to devote either adequate men or time to the organisation of the British Front for the defensive.

Both the fatigue and the depletion due to these ceaseless offensives played a great part in the British unpreparedness for meeting the enemy assault in the spring. The pervading weariness prejudicially affected the physique, the training and the tone of the whole Army, from the High Command to the infantry in the trenches and the labour battalions who had been working incessantly behind the lines. Nervous and mental lassitude can alone explain the extraordinary indecision and inactivity of our G.H.Q. which characterised the three

\* “Les armées françaises dans la grande guerre,” Vol. VI.

months that followed the end of the 1917 campaign. It permeated mind as well as muscle.

The effect on our reserves of the slaughter that never for one hour stopped either day or night for four months was inevitable. When the Cabinet Committee were considering in June, 1917, the Commander-in-Chief's proposals for an advance in Flanders, Sir William Robertson calculated, on the basis of estimates furnished by G.H.Q., that 130,000 men would cover the losses sustained on the whole British Front during the period of the offensive. We actually sent to France during the progress of the battle a much larger number to make up losses. As Sir William Robertson told Field-Marshal Haig in his letter of 3rd November, 1917, the Government had done better in the matter of infantry drafts to France during 1917 than they had promised. Haig had been informed that the numbers which would be sent to France between March 1st and October 31st would amount to 356,000. The drafts actually sent totalled 376,000 men. The ghastly massacres of the Flanders campaign completely falsified the estimates of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff; the total casualties on the whole British Front during the progress of the battle mounted up to the appalling figure of 399,000 men—three times the official military estimate. The infantry bore the brunt of these casualties. Had the original forecast been justified, there would have been an increase in the actual numbers of our combatant strength on the Western Front of 160,000 instead of a deficit of 100,000 men. For the massacre of brave men that won just four miles of indefensible mud the Government were not prepared by any warning or prediction given us by the military leaders. When we discovered what the actual deficit was, no conceivable measures taken by us then could have closed that bleeding gash before the end of March.

What about the German fatigue and losses in this campaign? They also were kept fighting until the first week in December, but their casualties were far less than ours. Their total losses on the British Front between July 1st and December 31st, 1917, amounted to 270,000. Had the casualties we inflicted on them been equal to those we sustained, the Germans could not have claimed any superiority in numbers for the spring offensive.

What about the tiredness of the German troops who had been engaged in these conflicts? Most of our soldiers had been flung into the battle of the morass between July and December; just over half of the German forces on the Western Front had fought in the Flanders campaign, and there was no exceptional strain placed upon the divisions which held the rest of the line. Moreover, the continuous stream of divisions that was brought over from Russia between December and March had already enjoyed a period of prolonged rest on that front. For months the fighting in Russia had been quite negligible. Their task was tedious but not tiring. These contrasts constituted the



most serious disadvantage in which we were placed by the events of the last few months. There is some controversy as to whether we had more combatants on the Western Front than the Germans possessed on the 21st March, 1918, or whether there was a small percentage in their favour. Even if the latter estimate were correct, a slight superiority, which would not appear till March, in the numbers of the German infantry would not have put in jeopardy an army defending prepared positions against an attack by troops who had all passed through the same exhausting experiences as themselves. The Germans had held the Western Front for two years against a combination which was 50 per cent. stronger than their own as far as numbers were concerned. The Allies, in spite of German reinforcements from the Eastern Front, had a considerable superiority in the West in the matter of guns, aeroplanes, tanks and machine-guns.

What was the position on the Austro-Italian Front? The Italian Army had been beaten and broken in one of the most disastrous defeats sustained by the Allied Powers since the early days of the War. It was being reformed and reconstituted, but that process would take time. Nothing much in the way of a serious offensive could be expected from the Italians during the campaign of 1918.

There were two areas in the vast battle where the Allies had done well. On the ocean the British Fleet were beating off the submarine attack, and in the East the British Armies had driven two Turkish Armies before them in headlong rout, captured some of the most famous cities in history, and reduced the Turkish Empire to such a state of exhaustion that one more resolute push would make it crumble to bits. The Turkish Army was utterly demoralised; its establishments were reduced by desertion to a half: so that in every regiment there was one deserter from the colours for every man that remained.

Nevertheless, taking East and West as a whole, on balance the *land* campaign had gone unmistakably in favour of the Central Powers. The less spectacular, but more decisive, fact of Britain's renewed command at sea was at the time not recorded and was ignored by the military advisers of the Allies. All they knew was that supplies of ammunition and food reached them regularly and in increasing quantities. The way to ultimate triumph was sought by great Generals on land. The life and death struggle on the great waters was never alluded to by the military chiefs of the Alliance, except in so far as it was used as an argument for withholding reinforcements of troops and munitions to remote battle areas. There is not a hint in any military appreciation by the British or French Staff of the events of 1917 or of the prospects for 1918, that the issue of the struggle with the submarines would ultimately decide the fate of the War.

The military situation at the end of the 1917 campaign thus gave a misleading impression of the relative position of the contending

nations and of the actual progress of the War and of its prospects. The German leaders—both military and civilian—realised better the actual state of affairs. Documents revealed since the War display the great anxiety felt by both the German High Command and the political chiefs on two questions: food, and the weakening of Germany's allies. In these two respects the situation was becoming so critical that the German High Command agreed that a final decision must be forced early in 1918, as it was considered unlikely that the Central Powers could feed their populations or that the tottering allies of the Fatherland could or would stagger through into 1919. These allies were fast becoming liabilities, not assets. To use Herr Hitler's striking phrase, the fate of Germany was entangled in a "coalition of cripples." The military ardour of Germany's allies was evaporating for many causes. The Turkish and Bulgarian peasants realised that they were being sacrificed in a quarrel which was not their own. The Turkish officers were sulky with resentment at the imperious Germans who bullied and shouted about inefficiencies and ineptitudes which were part of the tradition of the Turkish Army. The Turk was made to feel more and more that this was a German War, and that his interests were made subservient to those of the arrogant Goth. He saw that he was not fighting for Islam. Two groups of infidel nations were struggling for mastery. Which of them won was no concern of his. The Anatolian peasant therefore deserted the army not only by the thousand, but by the hundred thousand.

These facts must have been known to the Intelligence Department of our War Office, or at least, they ought to have been known. They were however withheld from the War Cabinet. For the War Cabinet was predisposed to strike a blow there, to disintegrate the Turks still more, to eliminate them completely; so a bandage had to be kept on its eyes, lest the realities of the situation should unduly encourage it to take exceptional measures to exploit Turkish disintegration in order to eliminate that Empire from the War. One-fifth of the men uselessly sacrificed at Passchendaele could have achieved that end, and put the Turks out of business by the end of 1917. The large British forces engaged on the two Turkish Fronts would have been available partly to reinforce our Army in France, partly to strengthen our troops on the Vardar. Bulgaria, with her Turkish flank uncovered, could not have resisted an attack. Roumania would then have revived her effort and Austria would thus have been out-flanked, and the effect on Russia would have been incalculable. Nothing but substantial help given by Germany in troops and equipment could have saved a break-up of the Central Alliance.

The first intimation given to us of the actual military situation in Turkey was in the famous paper prepared by the military advisers at Versailles which is known as Note 12.\* But the Germans were fully

\* The text of Note 12 is given at the end of Chapter LXXIV

aware of the deplorable state of the Turkish forces, and it was one of the circumstances that drove them to the inevitable conclusion that their Far Eastern ally might not be able to see them through 1918—certainly not beyond that year. As to Bulgaria, her peasant soldiers were heartily tired of the War. Their traditional enemies, the Turks, were now their allies. Their Serbian foes were a broken and a fugitive remnant in a strange land. The Bulgarian people were never united on the wisdom of joining the Central Alliance, and now Bulgarian fields were neglected, the harvests were disappointing, the cultivators lived in trenches on the bleak slopes of the Balkans, far from their beloved plains. What for? The peasant is a slow thinker, but although his mind travels slowly, he plods unerringly to the end of his journey, and he ultimately realised that all his privations and perils were endured, not for the honour, the security or the enlargement of Bulgaria, which could have been better assured by a timely understanding with the Western Powers, but in order to achieve the domination of the Teuton in Eastern Europe. This growing conviction weakened the fine fighting mettle of the Bulgarian soldiers. They became less and less eager to incur the risks and discomforts of this endless, and for them purposeless, war.

The General Staffs of the Western Powers do not seem to have understood what was going on, for they anticipated a strong enemy offensive in the Balkans as part of the troubles for which they had to provide in 1918. It appeared to them probable that the Germans and Austrians might divert to the Balkans some of the divisions released from Russia and this contingency caused them much apprehension. Only towards the autumn of the year 1918 did they discover how completely the fighting spirit of the Bulgarian Army had evaporated. But the Germans knew it well by the end of 1917. This aggravated their worry about the issue of the War if it were prolonged into the autumn of 1918.

But there is something still worse. The War Cabinet was left in ignorance not only of the Balkan but also of the Austrian situation. Facts that have come to our knowledge since the War demonstrated clearly that by the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918 Austria was almost at the point of collapse, owing to the food situation in that country, and General von Arz made urgent representations from Vienna to the German G.H.Q., in December, 1917, that "a number of armies had not even a single day's ration of flour in their possession."\* The Army rations had to be severely cut down early in January, and it was reported officially that "the conditions were in fact of such a kind that only the endurance of the severest deprivations made it possible for them [Austria] to hold out."\* The plenipotentiary of the Imperial War Food Ministry in Vienna, Baron von Raberau, reported on 20th January, 1918:—

\* Report of the Reichstag Commission, Vol. III.



"Whether Austria will be in a position to last out through February is questionable. . . .

Without any kind of reserves people will be living day by day from hand to mouth."\*

He implies that help from Germany is essential even to postpone the collapse until February, and he adds: —

"How far Germany still has an interest in supporting Austria will have to be regarded, no longer merely from the standpoint of German food supply, but as a question of high policy."\*

Seidler, President of the Austrian Ministry, and Landwehr, Austrian General of Supplies, reported: —

"The situation is as follows: Without help from outside, masses of the people will be dying in a few weeks. Germany and Hungary will contribute no more."\*

The Germans were in no position to contribute. Their own population was already suffering from the food shortage. The vitality of the people at home was being lowered. Even the men in the trenches had to be rationed severely, in some important ingredients of food. But Herr Seidler's reference to Hungary has a meaning. It shows that both the Germans and the Austrians were convinced that Hungary had a surplus of corn and meat but that she selfishly appropriated it for her own needs. That conviction was ominous; it was another sign of the approaching disruption in the ramshackle Empire. The Allied Governments were not fully apprised of the real condition of things in Austria-Hungary. It was vital to decision on the plans for 1918 that these facts should be known. But if the Army Intelligence Departments were in possession of the truth they did not pass it on to their respective Governments. Ludendorff and his Staff, however, knew it, and so did the Kaiser and his Ministers, and they came to the conclusion that Germany must anticipate that the structure of her alliances would crumble away before the end of 1918. Her own food situation was becoming more and more precarious. Even a good harvest would leave her with a shortage of 300,000 tons of corn, and her meat and milk supplies were quite inadequate to meet the minimum requirements of her Army and her population. There was a crippling shortage of fodder for the horses at the front. This, coupled with the lack of sufficient rubber, lubricants and petrol, reduced seriously the mobility of the German Army. Not merely was there an inadequate supply of draught-horses, but the deficiency of grain to keep up their strength considerably impaired their value. These

\* Report of the Reichstag Commission, Vol. III.

conditions, whether they were known or not to the Allied Staffs, never seemed to be taken into account in their comparisons of the relative capacity of the two armies for waging such a campaign as was anticipated in 1918. Rapidity of movement was essential on both sides for conducting an offensive on a great scale, now on one part and then on another part of the front. It is computed by competent military authorities that, owing to these shortages in the essentials of transport, no more than a third of the German Army could be regarded as mobile, the remaining two-thirds not being equipped with the necessary means of removal from one sector to another.

When we come to the story of the campaign of 1918, this paramount consideration will account for the long intervals which supervened between one great German attack and another, even when the time left to them was short and fast running out. During these anxious weeks, when every day we anticipated a renewal of the attack before we were able to reorganise a new front, I was at a loss to understand why Ludendorff gave us so much time to reinforce and reform our broken divisions, and to dig and wire formidable new positions. On the other hand, when the fateful moment came for Foch to launch his offensive he gave the German Army no time for restoration or reformation. The difference in the temperament of these two great soldiers is not altogether responsible for the contrast in their methods. It was largely a question of the mobility of the rival armies. The Allies were abundantly supplied with the means of transport to and from railheads. I was given a striking illustration of the extent to which deficiencies of transport hampered the movement of the German Army at a critical juncture by the late Hugo Stinnes. In the course of a conversation I had with him after the War, I asked him to explain why the victorious German Army did not capture Amiens in March, 1918. I informed him that they had already got through all our defences, and that we had no organised forces between the German advance guard and that city. He said it was entirely due to the breakdown in their transport, owing to the lack of rubber. There was a sharp snowstorm, the rubberless wheel rims became clogged, and it was impossible to bring up the necessary ammunition for the troops and for the guns. The soldiers could not even be fed.

The shortage of food in Central Europe indirectly diminished the number of German and Austrian troops that could be released for operations in the west owing to the Russian peace. The only hope which the Central Powers had of obtaining supplies of food and certain essential raw materials was in the exploitation of Russia. This could not be done without employing considerable forces in the occupation of the Russian cornfields and in pushing forward into the regions where oil was obtainable. These garrison and far-distant raiding columns absorbed a number of both German and Austrian divisions. Most of them, but not all, were of secondary quality, but even these,

if brought to the west, could have occupied quiet sectors and could have released fighting divisions for the battle front. They would also have been helpful as labour battalions.

All these considerations drove the German General Staff to the conclusion that a decision must be forced at the earliest possible moment.

That is why the German High Command did not attach overwhelming importance to the American Army. They did not anticipate that its intervention would count for a great deal until late in the campaign of 1918. They were confident of destroying one or other or both of the Allied Armies in France before the Americans were in a position to render effective aid. Their information as to the progress of American recruitment, training and equipment was on the whole accurate. They knew that a vast number of men had been called to the colours in the United States of America, but they also knew that their training was very deficient and their equipment utterly inadequate. They were also fully persuaded that "the preoccupation of tonnage with the supplying of the Entente excluded any extensive transport of troops, especially so long as the U-boat warfare was being maintained." Their conclusion on this point was "We need not therefore bother about the question as to the extent to which the Entente is in a position to bring strong American forces to Europe."\* It is true that by the beginning of 1918 the check received by the submarine owing to the establishment of the convoy system forced the German Intelligence Department to revise their estimates. But even then they did not foresee what British shipping was capable of achieving under the pressure of a great emergency. They also underrated the fighting qualities of the American divisions that were brought over. They did not doubt the excellence of the material, but they did not think it possible to train it in time for use except in quiet sectors of the Western Front. The Germans calculated that only a comparatively small proportion of the American Army could be put into the fighting line during the critical months of 1918. In this respect both the French and British military authorities were of the same opinion. Pétain thought the American Army would not count until 1919; our G.H.Q. were just as contemptuous of the arrival of American reinforcements and even more of their utility when they landed.

A perusal of the documents written during the War, whether on the side of the Germans or the Allies, reveals that both were in the dark. The fog of war was everywhere: we can see how apt adversaries in any conflict are to miscalculate each other's strength and weaknesses, each other's opportunities and resources. Some difficulties are exaggerated, others are under-estimated or altogether ignored. The strength of opponents is in some respects under-assessed and in others

\* Reichstag Committee: General Von Kuhl's Report on the American troops.



over-stated. These errors are by no means confined to military problems. They occur in politics, in law and in business. It is difficult to judge at any given moment whether these misconceptions constitute the basis of a given policy, or whether the policy has not inspired the miscalculation. Is an erroneous estimate of the facts responsible for the strategy, or is the strategy already determined upon responsible for the false manipulation of facts? As far as the Great War is concerned, time and reflection will ultimately provide the answer. As the years go by, and the realities stand out more clearly, and as personal prejudices fade or are eliminated, and more impartial conclusions can be derived from a calm survey of indisputable facts, it will be easier to reach a decision on these questions.

The Allied Staffs had not a monopoly in the realm of illusions. General Ludendorff was convinced that the pacifist movement in Britain was formidable and was growing in power day by day. He was of opinion that a reeling blow struck at the British Army would precipitate a political crisis in England, throw out of office what he conceived to be a bellicose and implacable War Ministry, and substitute for it a more pacific and amenable combination headed by Mr. Asquith and Lord Lansdowne. His Staff papers published by him since the War show what a part this estimate of the political possibilities in Britain played in his strategical schemes.

Did the necessity for finding arguments in favour of a great offensive tempt him to exaggerate the reports he received, or was the information which came to him the reason which prompted him to decide in favour of an offensive? On the other side Marshal Haig was persuaded that the German Army had exhausted its reserves early in October, that the terrible blows he was inflicting upon it at Passchendaele were destroying its morale, that 135 divisions were already pulverised and that the Germans were therefore not in a condition to resist an offensive on the Passchendaele Front continued up till November and then resumed in the spring. Did his ardour for the offensive he had planned and prosecuted colour his information, or did his information determine his strategy? Events which it will now be my duty to set forth show clearly how both Ludendorff and Haig were misled as to the fundamental facts which ought to have shaped their strategic plans; partly by informants upon whom they relied, partly by their own predispositions; and in each case their war plans were necessarily faulty. In the case of the German Army it led to irretrievable disaster. Ultimately in the case of the British Army the projected renewal of the Flanders offensive in the spring, when the Germans were at their strongest and the Allies at the greatest disadvantage, was overruled and irreparable catastrophe was averted.

## CHAPTER LXX

### THE BELLIGERENTS STATE THEIR PEACE TERMS

WERE no efforts made to stop all this horrible slaughter of brave men in many lands? There were tentative approaches and soundings. Towards the end of 1917 informal communications were received by us through Switzerland which indicated that Austria and Turkey were anxious to bring the War to an end by negotiation. They were both in a bad way. In spite of the overthrow of Russia and the signal defeat inflicted on Italy, the internal situation in Austria was extremely serious. Food supplies were so short that parts of the Empire were on the verge of starvation, and even in the Army it was difficult to feed the troops. The Slavonic populations were never enthusiastic about the War, and economic conditions produced discontent even in the Germanic areas of the Empire. The Emperor and his advisers were apprehensive of uprisings which might end in Revolution. The Cabinet, whilst naturally anxious to avoid futile *pourparlers* like those initiated by Prince Sixte's letters, which excited so much suspicion in the breasts of Italian statesmen, were alive to the importance of detaching Austria from the Central Alliance. They were convinced that the time had not come for entering into general peace negotiations. Germany was in no mood for conceding any terms which would be acceptable to the Allies or to America. She had humbled Russia to the dust. She had destroyed the Roumanian Army and was consuming Roumanian corn and drawing oil supplies from Roumanian wells. She had beaten off our attack on Flanders and had helped Austria to put the Italian Army to flight. She was far from being convinced that her submarine campaign had failed. She was still sinking our ships, and with her accession of fresh strength which came from the release of divisions from the Russian Front she was preparing a crashing attack on the exhausted French and British Armies in the West. A Peace Conference with such a Germany would give us none of our objectives and was only attainable on terms which would have left German militarism triumphant over all its foes. The point for the Cabinet to consider in all their Swiss feelers was whether there was any chance of effecting a separate peace with either Austria or Turkey, or with both.

When it was intimated to us that the Austrian Prime Minister, Count Czernin, was willing to send Count Mensdorff to Switzerland to meet a representative of the British Cabinet to discuss Peace, we felt that the dispatch of such a messenger constituted the best proof that the Austrian Government was in earnest in seeking a peaceable accommodaion of the bloody quarrel. For us, Mensdorff was a highly acceptable emissary. Before the War he was one of the best liked and most trusted of the foreign Ambassadors in this country. We decided therefore to send General Smuts to meet him in Switzerland. General Smuts was to be accompanied by Mr. Philip Kerr (now Lord Lothian), who was on my staff. Their instructions were to confine themselves to the discussion of a separate peace with Austria and not to be drawn into any conversation as to the terms of a general peace. They were also to ascertain through our Minister there what value there was in the approaches which had been made to him ostensibly from Turkish sources.

I give General Smuts' account of the conversations that took place. His report is an historical document of the first importance. It is a remarkable contemporary record of a frank interchange of views which took place at a critical stage of the War between one of the most experienced, as well as one of the ablest and sanest diplomatists of the time on the one hand, and on the other, one of the most enlightened statesmen of the day. Apart from the fact that it puts clearly before us the opinion thus formed by men of high intelligence as to the problems of peace, it has also a special value as representing very fairly the conclusions formed by men of calm judgment on either side, not only as to the attitude but also as to the military position of the belligerents at the end of 1917.

“ December 18-19, 1917.

I reached Geneva on the morning of 18th December and had a short interview with Count Mensdorff in a quiet suburb in the outskirts of Geneva. I had another long conversation with him in the afternoon, and a third conversation in the evening of the same day. I proceed to summarise the principal points of interest which emerged from these conversations.

Before leaving London I discussed separately with the Prime Minister and Mr. Balfour the line I should take in these conversations, and I conceived that the objects of my mission were twofold: first, to instil into the minds of the Austrians that in case they freed themselves from German domination and made a fresh start in sympathy with the British Empire they would have our full sympathy and support; and secondly, to gather as much information as possible while declining to enter into a general discussion of peace terms so far as the Germans were concerned.



As will appear from the sequel the conversations have been fruitful in both these respects. A third object which I had in mind was, if possible, to induce the Austrians to conclude a separate peace; but the subject was from many points of view a risky one to open, as I was anxious to avoid laying ourselves open to the charge in future of having intrigued with the Austrians for a separate peace. Before I reached this point in our discussions, however, Mensdorff saved me from the difficulties of my task by taking the initiative himself in declaring that a separate peace was for Austria entirely out of the question, that it would be madness on her part even to entertain the idea, that her circumstances rendered it impossible for her to carry it out, and that bad as her plight was it was not so desperate that she would do anything so treacherous and dishonourable. He said that she was not going to follow the example of Italy, and at the close of the conversations he returned to the subject and pointed out once more in the strongest language that a separate peace was not to be thought of. Austria was prepared to do anything to secure an honourable peace short of deserting her ally during the War. I gathered the impression that Mensdorff thought that the principal object of my mission was to discuss a separate peace, and I am therefore glad that I did not raise the point, but left it to be raised by him, which he did in the strongest language possible, and with evident sincerity.

I opened the conversations by saying that I had come in response to the numerous unofficial overtures from Austria which had reached us both through Holland and Switzerland in recent months. We thought it only courteous that some definite response should be made to these overtures and that an opportunity should be given to hear what Austria had to say. I pointed out to him that the friendly feeling towards Austria which had existed among the British people before the War had by no means disappeared, that a great deal of sympathy continued to be felt for Austria, especially as she was looked upon not so much as a principal antagonist, but valued as having been used by Germany both in the policy which led to the War, as well as during the course of the War. The downfall of Russia had created fresh anxiety for the political future of Europe, and it was feared in many influential quarters that unless some counterweight was established on the Continent to Germany in the place of Russia, the future peace of Europe might continue to be precarious. From this point of view it was a matter of grave concern that Austria should no longer continue her rôle of subordination to Germany, that she should be emancipated from German domination, and should, with the assistance of the Entente, and especially of the British Empire, make a fresh start of complete independence *vis-à-vis* the German Empire. If Austria

was prepared to play that rôle and break with Germany she would have not only our sympathy but our active support, and we would do everything in our power to uphold and strengthen her and to assist her economic reconstruction.

To this Mensdorff replied that he was most gratified to hear this, and all the more so because the last word which we had spoken officially in regard to this matter was in the Allied reply to President Wilson's Note at the beginning of 1917, in which the practical break-up and partition of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was foreshadowed as one of our principal war aims. I assured him that that note never had had such an intention, and that its object, and still more our object now, was to assist Austria to give the greatest freedom and autonomy to her subject nationalities. The best way to strengthen the bonds of sympathy between the British and Austro-Hungarian people was to liberalise as much as possible the local institutions of Austria-Hungary. We had no intention of interfering in her internal affairs, but we recognised that if Austria could become a really liberal Empire in which her subject peoples would, as far as possible, be satisfied and content, she would become for Central Europe very much what the British Empire had become for the rest of the world. She would become a League of Free Nations, very largely free from the taint of militarism, and she would have a mission in the future even greater than her mission in the past. Looking to the future of Europe, and the new orientation which it was necessary to give to the published policy of Europe, it seemed to thoughtful people in England that the above rôle was not only the nobler one for Austria-Hungary, but was also necessary in order to secure the full sympathy and co-operation of the Entente, and especially of the British Empire and America, and was still more necessary to prevent any future military dictatorship in Europe with its promise of fresh troubles for the world. For all this it seemed to me absolutely necessary that Austria should become entirely disassociated from the German Empire and should establish the friendliest relations with those Entente Powers that were actuated by fundamental pacific tendencies. I continued to labour this point with him and to point out what a success the British Empire had made of the government of divers races and peoples, and that Austria, by following the same liberal policy—a policy directed to the peaceful self-development of its peoples through the widest local autonomy—could probably achieve a no less striking success in Central Europe, and that peoples not now directly within her orbit might be drawn to her in future by the attractions of her new policy. For her, peace and liberty were as essential as for the British Empire, and now that Russia had disappeared as the principal military danger upon her flank there was no reason why she should not adopt this policy and lean more

and more towards the British Empire and dissociate herself from German militarism.

Mensdorff replied that these views would find the heartiest response in the most influential quarters in Austria-Hungary. Austrian statesmen were determined to make a fresh start after the War, but he emphasised once more that nothing could be done to break away from Germany or to begin the new policy while the War lasted. The views which I had expressed with regard to the political future of Austria-Hungary would appeal very deeply to its rulers. He knew that both the Emperor and Count Czernin were actuated very much by sentiments similar to those which I had expressed. Czernin, he said, was not a diplomat of the old school, but a young statesman descended from the ancient Royal House of Bohemia, full of lofty political idealism, and determined to see an end to all this military régime which has been the undoing of Europe. The views which he had so strongly and repeatedly expressed in favour of general disarmament and a League of Nations to safeguard the public order of Europe after this war, represented his deepest political convictions, and had incurred the wrath of influential sections of the German people. Mensdorff regretted that no word of sympathy had come from England for the policy stated by Czernin. Instead they in Austria had met only either with cold disdainful silence or the sneers of the Press. He hoped that it would still be possible for British statesmen publicly to extend their sympathy to Czernin's views, and in that way to create a better atmosphere for solving the problems of the future.

I pointed out in reply to this that the views of the British Government were perfectly well known to be favourable to a League of Nations, and that our leading statesmen had repeatedly expressed their agreement with President Wilson in that regard. But we felt very strongly that the mere machinery of a League of Nations would not only be useless, but would be positively dangerous unless it was established on the basis of a satisfactory peace, a peace which would not leave Germany in military predominance on the Continent, and which, in its territorial aspects, would as far as possible satisfy the principle of nationality. The German Empire had developed unsuspected military strength and predominance during this war, and the British people felt that whether Germany was inside or outside a League of Nations, it would, through the military power which it had developed, be able, at any time, to wreck the good work of the League. The danger and fear which have overhung Europe and led to this war would continue to exist, and anxiety among the other nations for their future would continue to stimulate them to fresh military preparations. It was therefore essential for the League of Nations



that the German military domination should be broken in this war, and that the political dispositions of Central Europe after the War should afford some safeguard against its re-establishment.

He said in reply to this that we were evidently underrating the new developments in Germany which were making for a new order. The Parliamentarisation of Germany had already proceeded much further than was commonly appreciated, and the effect of the repeated Chancellor crises was that it had now become impossible to have a government in Germany without a majority in the Reichstag. That was the real inwardness of all the obscure crises which had recently taken place. If we expected more at present and looked forward to a revolution in Germany during the War we were much mistaken. The German working-classes were highly educated, and had developed great political capacity (*Regierungsfähigkeit*), and even before the War the Socialist Party in Germany was the most powerful in Europe. But they certainly were not going to follow the example of the Russians, nor would they betray their country while it was in danger; and it was generally anticipated that as soon as the War was over and the armies returned from the fronts, and the German people settled down again there would be the most far-reaching political changes. To my observation that the German civil government seems rather to have lost ground in comparison with the General Staff, whose efficiency had more and more established its predominance in Germany during the War, he replied with a contemptuous gesture that the whole military régime would be blown away as soon as the War was over and the German people could speak.

He then tried to get on to general peace terms and said that in his opinion the time had come to open informal discussions between Great Britain and Germany, and if Austria as a friendly party could be used as an intermediary she would be highly gratified. I thanked him, but said that the time for discussing peace terms with the Germans had certainly not come, that neither the British public nor the British Government were in a temper to discuss peace with the German Government, and that our conversations should be confined entirely to questions affecting Austria-Hungary. To this he agreed, but with evident regret, and several times thereafter he made attempts to open a general discussion of German terms of peace, but was constantly met by a blank refusal by me to enter into a discussion of this topic.

The conversation then drifted on to territorial questions in connection with the peace, which might affect Austria-Hungary. Mensdorff himself raised the question of Poland, which, he said, from its superior culture had rather a Western than an Eastern orientation. I said it was essential from the point of view which we had been discussing that the future Polish Kingdom should not

have a German orientation. He replied that there was little fear of that; that owing to the liberal policy that Austria had followed the future Polish State was much more likely to co-operate with Austria than with Germany. I said that we were pledged to an independent Kingdom or State of Poland, but that if Austria really broke away from Germany and realised the mission sketched out above, the possibility of some link of a personal or a loose nature between Austria and Poland was not excluded, and that the addition of Galicia to Poland might be a desirable move from that point of view. He said that a solution of the Polish question on those lines would commend itself to Austria-Hungary and might even appeal to the Poles themselves. There were constitutional difficulties, but he thought that it was possible to bring the future larger Poland within the orbit of the Austrian Empire of the future.

I asked him next if some such solution was found of the Polish question and Austrian influence was thereby greatly increased that means should be found to satisfy the reasonable claims of those States to whom we were pledged by various promises made during the War, such as Serbia, Roumania, and Italy. He said that he thought the case of Serbia did not present much difficulty so far as Austria was concerned. Austria disliked the Karageorgevitch dynasty which was founded on assassination, and would welcome guarantees which would prevent Serbia from becoming once more a centre of anti-Austrian intrigue. He also thought that Bulgaria would hold on to the Bulgarian parts of Serbia and that it would be a wise policy to acquiesce in her doing so. I replied that Serbia might in that case legitimately claim compensation, and that it was worthy of consideration whether the best policy even from the Austrian point of view was not to follow the principle of nationality and add Bosnia-Herzegovina to Serbia and bring Serbia into the Dalmatian coast, and to bring the greater Serbia thus constituted into a more friendly relation with Austria-Hungary. He asked what relation I meant, whether it was a loose political union or some economic union. I replied that I could not say, and that it was a question in which Serbia would have to be consulted, but that it seemed to me essential if the foundations of a future peaceful Europe were to be laid that rearrangements on a national basis should as far as possible be effected, and that a far-sighted policy followed by Austria now might conciliate the Southern Slav peoples and assist her to realise the great mission and position which might be in store for her. I pointed out that Russia would no longer be there to foment anti-Austrian feeling among the Southern Slavs and that was the best guarantee which Austria could have for the future. The rest must be left to wise statesmanship, and sound territorial arrangement. Mensdorff appeared to me to be not unfavourable to this point of view which I was urging, although

he did not openly commit himself. When, however, I came to Roumania he became somewhat excited and said that Roumania was finished and that they would do nothing for that treacherous State, and Hungary would refuse to surrender an inch of territory to Roumania, and that his brother-in-law, Count Apponyi, who was really a pacifist, had assured him only a few days ago that Hungary would fight to the last ditch rather than surrender any territory to Roumania. Mensdorff added that it was only a fringe of Transylvania which was inhabited by Roumanians. I pointed out in reply that considerable parts of Bukovina and Bessarabia had a predominantly Roumanian population, and that as Bulgaria was also claiming the Bulgarian part of Dobrudja, the question of bringing together the Roumanian people into one State was one well worthy of consideration and that it was in the interest of Austria-Hungary to have a friendly and satisfied Roumania on her flank. He said that Bukovina was on a different footing from Transylvania, and that he hoped that no proposals would be made which meant any partition of Hungarian territory as this would be most fiercely resisted by the Hungarians. Bessarabia was, of course, a question in which Austria was not concerned, and I did not gather that he was opposed to my suggestion so far as Bukovina was concerned.

This brought us on to Italy. Mensdorff asked how we could defend the national principle in connection with the promises which we had made to Italy in the Balkans, where we had promised to Italy territories which contained few Italians and a predominantly Slav or Slovene population. He also asked how it was possible if we were favourably disposed towards the future Austria-Hungary that we could think of practically cutting her off from outlets to the sea and planting the Italians on both shores of the Adriatic. Apart from Dalmatia, Trieste had never belonged to Italy, had voluntarily decided centuries ago to come under Austria and had been under Austria ever since. Austria would never agree to Trieste being wrenched from her or to be deprived of proper access to the Adriatic. Italy had no right to be at Valona either.

I did not want to discuss these questions with him as I was not fully conversant with them but it seemed to me indisputable from every point of view that the Trentino should be ceded to Italy. The strategic frontier of Italy in the north was impossible, and Trentino was an almost entirely Italian population. To his observation that after the treachery of Italy there was no disposition to make any concessions to her, I replied that Italy would never have been induced to desert Austria if the latter did not sit on territory which Italy could legitimately claim to be hers, and that from the point of view of future peace and security it seemed to me desirable in the highest interests of Austria to suppress all feelings



of resentment towards Italy, to deal with her on high statesmanlike lines, and by the surrender to her of the Trentino to secure a friend and ally in Italy. To this he made no further objection, and I did not press him any further on the point. My own feeling was that Austria would be prepared for a deal, although he did not expressly say so.

In all this discussion of territorial questions I purposely abstained from going too deeply into details at this stage, as I intended merely to have a preliminary canter over the ground in order to satisfy myself in my capacity as a scout of the general attitude of the Austrians on the question of territorial concessions. The impression I formed was that the Austrian mind was in an accommodating mood, and that moderate and reasonable proposals from us would meet with serious and favourable consideration. Further I did not think it wise to go at this stage, as not only are we not in possession of the revised views of our Allies, but I am also doubtful whether the War Cabinet has come to even provisional conclusions on the difficult matters touched upon in these conversations.

This finished the conversation in the afternoon.

In the evening we had another conversation, in which Mensdorff made repeated efforts to induce me to discuss general peace terms. I, however, firmly declined to do so, but allowed him to make several statements of great interest which I shall mention later. He seemed to have been under the impression that I was merely manœuvring in refusing to discuss general peace terms, and when finally he realised that he was wrong he seemed deeply disappointed. He exclaimed that in that case there was no peace in sight and that this horrible War must go on. Europe, he said, was dying at the centre, America was becoming the financial and economic centre of the world, while Japan at the other end was gathering to herself immense power and resources and the whole trade of Asia. Why were we going on fighting? The British Prime Minister had said that we must have victory, Asquith had said that Prussian militarism must be crushed. If another year of this destruction had to pass the position of Europe and civilisation, already so pitiable, would indeed be beyond repair. What was the sort of victory we had in view? How would we know it and when would we consider it to be achieved? Did we want the Hohenzollerns to go? Surely, that was not likely to happen during the War, and would in any case not justify the practical destruction of European civilisation. Any political revolution in Germany would follow, not precede, the peace. Or did we intend the break-up of the German Army, or the occupation of Belgium? Surely that was no reasonable expectation either.

I explained to him how deeply impressed the British people were

with the dangers to the future political system of Europe, if Germany survived as a sort of military dictator, and that we meant to continue the War until either victory had been achieved or the dark forces of revolution had done their work in Germany as they had already done in Russia. We were in a good position to go on. America was coming in with resources far greater and more real than any we had lost through the defection of Russia. France had suffered but little this year, and her Army had a very high morale and quite sufficient reserves for next year; while our full resources in mechanical and man-power were only now being mobilised for the decisive phases of the War. I explained to him how the submarine and shipping situation had altered since last spring, and that we were now in a position, if necessary, to go on indefinitely as we had done during the Napoleonic Wars. The menace of Germany was no less grave than the menace of Napoleon, and was meeting with an even more determined temper on the part of the British people.

He replied that that would indeed be the end of Europe. Was it really worth while? He again asked what this vague victory was for which all these immeasurable sacrifices had to be made. What was the definition of it, or what was the measure of proof of it? Surely the German Army was not going to put up the white flag and openly abase itself and acknowledge defeat. It would continue the defence as brave men knew how to do. To his mind it was necessary to define clearly what we meant by victory. He would see only one test of our victory, and that was that we should define our aims closely, and place our terms before the enemy, and that the enemy should either accept or reject them. Otherwise the War would continue in misunderstanding, in darkness and fog, so to say. If the enemy accepted our terms we would have won; if not, we could go on until he was forced to accept them. He pleaded for reasonable terms. He urged that the way should be prepared for their acceptance by Germany by means of preliminary conversations with Austria, in which the Germans were or were not to take part, according as we wished. He did not anticipate that the German attitude would be unreasonable. Belgium, he thought, would be evacuated, provided German economic and industrial interests, which before the War were very great in Belgium were not injured or hampered. He did not believe there was any intention to annex any of the occupied parts of Russia. He could not say this for certain, but would be most surprised if the Germans made any such claim. About Alsace-Lorraine he knew that there were great difficulties, but incidentally he here asked the significant question, whether France wanted the whole of Alsace-Lorraine back. He continued that the Germans were very keen to get their colonies or some of them back, and he

thought they would claim heavy compensation if we declined to return them. Above all, they would resist to the utmost a post-War economic war, as that would mean their practical boycott from the markets of the world. Such an economic war would be inconsistent with the new international system which we wished to promote after the War, and Austria, no less than Germany, would resist it to the utmost. He hoped that the objects which we had in view would be fair, reasonable and moderate; if they were, the time had come for their achievement, and for that purpose it would be highly desirable to clear up the situation by further discussions of an informal character, in which the Germans need not necessarily take a part to begin with.

I did not enter into a discussion of these general questions, and the Count went on to say with obvious sincerity that the two greatest peoples on earth, the two greatest peoples that had ever existed, were the British and the Germans, that the future of the world depended on both of them and on their co-operation, that it was not in the interests of the world that either of them should be utterly defeated, even if that were possible, and that such a defeat would become the source of fresh calamities for the future of mankind. He hoped most earnestly that reason would prevail. I replied that it was only because of our solicitude for the future that we did not wish to leave the root of the evil to survive and to grow afresh in the future. It was not from any warlike spirit but because of our horror of war that we were prepared to endure its evils longer for the present in order to end them for the future—to which he retorted, in lighter vein, that the Entente did certainly seem more warlike at present than the Central Powers.

This brought our conversations to an end, and we said good-bye to each other.

The following morning, 19th December, the Count, who had ascertained that I was stopping another day in Geneva, sent a message to ask whether he could have another interview with me. I therefore saw him again in the afternoon of the same day, and he said to me that he was anxious that both of us should be clear on certain points. In the first place, Austria would be prepared to go any length with us in pressing on Germany a policy of disarmament, including the submarine and similar developments, and the policy of conferences and arbitration against war in future. In the second place he was profoundly thankful for the sympathy which I had expressed for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and when in future they took a line of their own independent of Germany they would count on our support. In the third place he trusted that at the peace we would use our influence with our friends to moderate their demands, and in that case Austria would do her best to meet us fairly.



In reply I repeated some of the views already expressed in the preceding conversations. I added that Austria had now a great opportunity to show the highest statesmanship and thereby to help the world towards an early, satisfactory and lasting settlement. She would have to free herself from German influence and make a fresh independent start of her own. She would also have to give up some small things in order to realise the greater destiny that might be in store for her. He replied that it was very hard to give away after the shocking behaviour especially of Roumania and Italy, but Austria would be prepared to meet us reasonably if we stood by her and made no unfair claims.

I soon saw, however, that something else was really on his mind. He then came out with it. He said that the War must be ended, and that it was the fervent ambition of Austria to be the instrument for bringing this about. A separate peace would be impossible, but Austria, whose sympathies were really with Great Britain, wished in future to work with her. Austria could stand between the great enemies and help towards peace if use was made of her. She was ready and anxious to do anything. Especially must we not separate now that conversations had started. He hoped we would meet again to pursue our discussions, if possible into greater details. Next time, or the time after next, he felt sure that Count Czernin would come to the discussion if we wanted one who could speak with more authority. He hoped it would be possible in such a case to fix a meeting-place nearer the Austrian frontier. If we did not wish to speak to the Germans the discussions might again be confined to the Austrian aspect of peace. If again we wished to have a more general discussion but still not with the Germans, we could make use of Czernin, who was in sympathy with British ideals and could usefully smooth away preliminary difficulties with the Germans.

He hoped that the agencies which we had used to get into touch on this occasion would be used again for the same purpose, and that we would meet again soon. He returned once more to the subject of victory and *said it was misleading to talk of victory, for while the Germans had been successful in Central Europe, the British Empire had gained far more lasting and far-reaching victories over the whole world, and was now in complete control of everything outside Central Europe.* The victory was already ours in a very important sense, and it was useless to continue to shed the blood of tens and hundreds of thousands of the youth of Europe for a greater measure of military success, which might or might not be achieved in future.

I repeated to him what I had previously said, that I did not think we were prepared to talk to Germany, but we appreciated his suggestion to keep the present conversations on foot, and would bear

in mind what he had said about Czernin. If, on their part, the Austrians wished to speak to us again, the same channels would avail unless secrecy demanded resort to other channels.

We then parted.

In conclusion I wish to say that I have not the least doubt that the line we have taken with Austria on this occasion will prove most useful and fruitful. It evidently made a deep impression on Count Mensdorff. From the very depths of her abasement and despair, Austria has been made to see daylight, and I expect that she will strain every nerve to induce Germany to accept moderate terms, and that she will thereafter strive, with our assistance, to recover and assert her political independence of Germany. Whether the vision of a truly liberal Austria will really appeal to her statesmen, the future alone will show.

In all these conversations I deliberately refrained from a word of reference to Turkey."

It will be observed that at that date we did not contemplate a complete break-up of the Austrian Empire, but rather that within its bounds there should be set up a number of free autonomous and practically independent States on the model of the British Empire. There are a few outstanding inferences to be drawn from this remarkable document:—

1. At that date the negotiation of a separate peace with Austria was out of the question. Mensdorff, representing as he did the Austrian Prime Minister's views, would regard such a peace as dishonouring to the Empire. That was in itself conclusive as to the impracticability of further negotiation. Even had we agreed to a general Conference, France would treat it as an abandonment and a betrayal.

2. No concessions were to be made to Italy and Roumania. Their entry into the War on the side of the Allies was regarded as an act of unutterable treachery. In fact, Mensdorff said that if Austria were to make a separate peace with the Allies she would be "as base as Italy." There was the additional objection to conceding any territory to either Italy or Roumania, that at that moment they were both in the position of beaten foes. We could not take that view without betraying Italy, who was still fighting on our side.

3. Germany was, in the estimation of Mensdorff, militarily triumphant. He evidently believed she could not be beaten. The worst that could befall her would be a stalemate. She could not, therefore, contemplate a peace based on the assumption that she was already defeated or was likely to be beaten in the end.

The Cabinet considered this report a complete justification of their view that the time had not yet arrived for a general Peace Conference in which Germany would be included.

On the other hand, Mensdorff made a fruitful suggestion which we felt might be acted upon without delay. He urged us to state our peace terms in a way which would be so clear and definite that our enemies could not fail to understand what were our aims. If they felt they were reasonable they would be accepted. On the other hand, if they did not form a basis for discussion they would be rejected. We would all then know exactly where we stood.

A similar suggestion came from Dr. Parodi, an agent of the opposition party in Turkey, who had come to Switzerland with the intention of establishing contact with the Allies, and was interviewed there by Mr. Kerr. He admitted that for the time being the Germanophile section of the Committee of Union and Progress which governed Turkey was uppermost, but he thought that the proclamation of moderate terms might reverse the proportions. Enver Pasha, the strongest man in the Government, was a pure militarist Germanophile, and was still confident that Germany would win the War. His principal colleague, Talaat Pasha, thought Germany would be neither victorious nor beaten and that there would be a *paix blanche* more or less on the basis of the *status quo*. Philip Kerr's informant thought that if we made it clear that one of our objects was to establish Arab autonomy it would hearten the Arabs and further the antagonism which existed between the Arab and Turkish officers.

Mr. Kerr's interview with Dr. Parodi was not satisfactory. Parodi did not profess to represent the Turkish Government and it was clear from this conversation that the governing party in the Turkish Empire was not yet ready to enter into any negotiations with the Allies on any terms which we could entertain—or even discover. Mr. Kerr's Report is given in full in Appendix I to this chapter.

The net result of this visit to Switzerland was to leave the impression that a separate peace with Austria and Turkey was not attainable just yet, but that the time had arrived when it was desirable that the Government should re-state the terms upon which it was prepared to make peace.

There was another reason why a re-statement of our war aims was necessary at this juncture. We were coming to the last, and in so many ways the most critical stage of the War. There was a great deal of pacifist propaganda at home which, operating on a natural weariness, might develop into a dangerous anti-war sentiment that would undermine the morale of the nation at a time when the event depended on the staying power of the nations. All the belligerent nations were confronted with this situation. In Germany, Austria and Russia the Peace sentiment was fostered amongst the population by hardship and privation and even actual hunger. It was one of the



reasons why I attached so much importance to the question of maintaining our food supplies. The desire for peace was spreading amongst men and women who, although they were convinced of the righteousness of the War, felt that the time had come for putting an end to its horrors in the name of humanity, if it could be done on any terms that were honourable and safe. Lord Lansdowne constituted himself the spokesman of this sentiment. He represented a powerful and growing section of the people not only in social, but also in industrial circles. The suffering was not confined to one class. All classes alike shared the tortures of sorrow for the fallen, and the anxieties of incessant apprehension for those who were in the zone of death. Amongst the workmen there was an unrest that was disturbing and might at any moment become dangerous. The efforts we were making to comb out more men for the Army were meeting with resistance amongst the Trade Unions, whose loyalty and patriotism had throughout been above reproach. I attached great importance to retaining their continued support in the prosecution of the War. Had they been driven into hostility, a dangerous rift in the home front would have been inevitable. Germany was to find out how fatal to success was the alienation of organised labour. The influence of the MacDonald section of the Labour Movement was becoming greater, and their agitation was intensifying and gaining fresh adherents. One of their number informed me that he never attended more packed and enthusiastic meetings than those which he addressed on peace during the last year or two of the War. It was essential to convince the nation that we were not continuing the War merely to gain a vindictive or looting triumph, but that we had definite peace aims and that these were both just and attainable.

The difficulties with our man-power had almost produced a deadlock with the Trade Unions. Without their goodwill and co-operation, we could not have secured further recruits from amongst the exempted—certainly not without a resistance which might have alienated organised labour throughout the land. It therefore became necessary to open negotiations with them. I decided, first of all, to invite the Trade Unions to a Conference on the subject of our war aims. In order to ensure their co-operation it was necessary to place before them with complete frankness the purpose with which we were prosecuting the War. The Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress and of the Labour Party had already formulated their peace proposals on 16th December. They did not differ in any material respect from those which we were putting forward. That rendered my task very much easier, for there had been mischievous statements circulated in the Press and at meetings and in private that our aims were of an "imperialistic" and predatory character, and that we were only continuing the cruelties and sufferings of war in order to secure these nefarious objects.

I therefore had a detailed and a careful statement prepared of our peace objectives. They were considered in the greatest detail by the Cabinet and approved by them. As I had been informed by an eminent American, who was in touch with the Asquith section of the Liberals, that they thought "opinion in favour of continuing the War was weakening in this country," I thought it desirable to secure their assent to the peace proposals we intended to put forward, so that the peace terms we proclaimed should be national in the true sense of the word. I arranged a private meeting with Mr. Asquith and Lord Grey to discuss our peace declaration.

We met at breakfast at Mr. Asquith's house. I read to them the document which I had prepared. I had already obtained the Cabinet assent to its terms. With some slight alterations, entirely in the wording, they approved its terms. The suggested amendments were duly incorporated. The Cabinet took the necessary steps to inform the Dominions of the nature of the statement I proposed to make. Their approval was secured before we committed ourselves.

The Conference with the Trade Unions took place at the Caxton Hall on the 5th January, 1918. It was a crowded gathering of delegates and thoroughly representative. I gave to them in full the declaration of our war aims. Although no resolution was passed, at the end of the meeting there was every indication of a general acceptance by the delegates of the proposals submitted to them. Inasmuch as the terms of peace outlined on this occasion represented not merely the views of Ministers and their supporters, but of Labour, the Independent Liberals and the Dominions, and were subsequently embodied in the Treaty of Versailles, the statement I made to the Trade Unions is an essential part of my narrative of the War. I accordingly include the full text of my speech in Appendix II to this chapter. As will be seen by a reference to it, I made it clear that our one object in the War was to defend the violated public law of Europe, to vindicate Treaty obligations and to secure the restoration of Belgium. We intended to stand by French democracy in its demand for the restitution of its lost provinces and to secure national freedom for those parts of the Austrian Empire which were at present held in unwilling bondage to an alien race. As to the ultimate peace settlement, I concluded my speech by saying:—

"... whatever settlement is made will be suitable only to the circumstances under which it is made, and, as those circumstances change, changes in the settlement will be called for.

So long as the possibility of dispute between nations continues, that is to say, so long as men and women are dominated by passionate ambition, and war is the only means of settling a dispute, all nations must live under the burden not only of having from

time to time to engage in it, but of being compelled to prepare for its possible outbreak. The crushing weight of modern armaments, the increasing evil of compulsory military service, the vast waste of wealth and effort involved in warlike preparation, these are blots on our civilisation of which every thinking individual must be ashamed.

For these and other similar reasons, we are confident that a great attempt must be made to establish by some international organisation an alternative to war as a means of settling international disputes. After all, war is a relic of barbarism, and just as law has succeeded violence as the means of settling disputes between individuals, so we believe that it is destined ultimately to take the place of war in the settlement of controversies between nations.

If, then, we are asked what are we fighting for, we reply, as we have often replied—we are fighting for a just and lasting peace—and we believe that before permanent peace can be hoped for three conditions must be fulfilled.

First, the sanctity of treaties must be re-established; secondly, a territorial settlement must be secured based on the right of self-determination or the consent of the governed; and, lastly, we must seek by the creation of some international organisation to limit the burden of armaments and diminish the probability of war.

On these conditions the British Empire would welcome peace; to secure those conditions its peoples are prepared to make even greater sacrifices than those they have yet endured."

Prince Max of Baden in referring to my speech in his Memoirs says:—

"Immediately after this speech, the rift in the British home front closed."

Henceforth, those who were seeking disunion for political or personal motives were forced into another tack in which Labour had no interest.

Shortly after the meeting I received the following letter from Mr. Clynes, who was Minister of Food at that time:—

"Dear Prime Minister,

I have had the opportunity within the past few days while on work for the above Ministry of meeting representative men in Conferences and in other ways, and I would like to send you this line to say what a splendid effect your speech to the Labour Delegates has had on the minds of men who were getting rather unsettled because of the length of the War and the effects of a form of propaganda which has been freely continued.



Most of what was said of course was not new, but the occasion and the form of the speech have been of the greatest value.

Yours faithfully,  
J. R. CLYNES."

A few days later, President Wilson gave utterance to his famous Fourteen Points. This declaration, which subsequently played such an important part at the Armistice and the Peace Conference, was not regarded by any of the Allies as being at variance on vital matters, except in respect of Freedom of the Seas, with their own declarations—although we never formally accepted them, and they constituted no part of the official policy of the Alliance.

In an allusion to my speech President Wilson said:—

"Within the last week, Mr. Lloyd George has spoken with admirable candour and in admirable spirit for the people and government of Great Britain."

M. Pichon also made a declaration on behalf of France which corresponded with that of the British Government.

Meanwhile, the Germans felt that it was essential that some response should be made by them to the peace declarations of Allied statesmen. They knew that not only the world but their own people were waiting for their answer. The prolongation of the War or its end depended not on the voice of Austria, but of her powerful ally, Germany. Long communications on the subject passed between the Kaiser, Hindenburg, Ludendorff and the German Chancellor. These messages or their purport were not of course known to the Allies at that time, but they have since seen the light, and as an indication of the German attitude towards peace at the beginning of 1918, the letter written by Hindenburg to the Kaiser on the 7th January is significant. The underlining of passages was made by the Kaiser at the time and indicates his attitude.

"General Headquarters,  
7th January, 1918.

Your Majesty,

has been pleased to command that General Ludendorff and I should take a responsible part in the peace negotiations. Your Majesty, in doing so, made it our right and duty to see to it that the result of the peace corresponds to the sacrifices and achievements of the German people and army, and that the peace strengthens us materially and brings us such strong frontiers, that our opponents will not be so ready to venture to let loose a fresh war.

In all discussions under the presidency of Your Majesty and

with the Chancellor we have pointed to the importance of protected frontiers as a vital question for Germany. It is doubtful whether such frontiers will be obtained, and this troubles me considerably."

Then follow lengthy complaints of the way the Army Staff's views regarding Austria, Lithuania and Poland had been overlooked. He was especially angry about the cession of Poland to Austria. He points to the criticism of the Army outside and adds the ominous sentence which is underlined by the Kaiser: "I cannot suppress the fear that the manner in which the negotiations were conducted and the result in Brest will unfavourably influence the temper of the Army."

But the most significant paragraph of all is the following:—

"The latter is now being put to a great test. In order to secure for ourselves the political and economic world position, which we need, we must beat the Western Powers. For this reason Your Majesty ordered the attack in the West. This involves by far the greatest effort we have made during the whole war; the greatest sacrifices will be asked for. After the incidents at Brest I doubt whether at the conclusion of peace we shall obtain the rewards which our predominance demands and which are *worthy of our sacrifices*. *The unavoidable effect* would be a *terrible disappointment* for the home-coming army and for the nation which would have to bear prohibitive taxes. . . .

I am definitely convinced that the policy advocated by us leads to a strengthening of the monarchy and an extended predominance of Germany, whilst the opposite policy can only bring Germany down from the height to which Your Majesty and the ancestors of Your All-Highest led her."

On the publication of the speeches of President Wilson and myself, Count Hertling, the German Imperial Chancellor, and Count Czernin were charged with the enemy replies. On 24th January, Count Hertling spoke in the Reichstag and, after referring to the Brest-Litovsk negotiations proceeded:—

"Two announcements have, as we all know, been made in the meantime by enemy statesmen—the speech by the English Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, of 5th January, and the message of President Wilson of the day after. I freely admit that Mr. Lloyd George has changed his tone. He no longer uses abuse, and thus appears to wish to establish again his claim to negotiating abilities, of which I had previously despaired. All the same I cannot go

so far as the many opinions from neutral countries which claim to read in the speech of Mr. Lloyd George a sincere desire for peace, and even a friendly spirit. It is true that he declares that he does not wish to destroy Germany, and that he has never wanted to destroy her. He even finds expressions of respect for our economic, political and cultural position, but amongst them there is no lack of other utterances, and between the lines there is always present that it is his duty to sit in judgment on guilty Germany for all sorts of crimes.

This is the spirit, gentlemen, with which naturally we can have nothing to do, and in which as yet we can observe no trace of a sincere desire for peace. We are supposed to be culprits over whom the Entente is now sitting in judgment."

He then entered into an elaborate defence of Germany's action in waging war and holding on to Alsace-Lorraine. His announcement that Germany would not part with it was received in the Reichstag with "Loud Cheers." He then made a very significant and sinister allusion to German designs on the invaded provinces of France.

"The occupied parts of France are a valuable pawn in our hands. Here also forcible annexation forms no part of the official German policy. *The conditions and mode of the evacuation*, which must take into consideration the vital interests of Germany, must be agreed between Germany and France. I can only once again expressly emphasise that there can never be any question of the separation of the Imperial Provinces. We will never permit ourselves to be robbed of Alsace-Lorraine by our enemies under the pretext of any fine phrases—of Alsace-Lorraine, which in the meantime, has become more and more closely allied internally with German life, which is developing more and more economically in a highly satisfactory manner, and where more than 87 per cent. of the people speak the German mother tongue. (Loud cheers.)"

Not much hope there. Even the provinces of France occupied in this war were only to be returned "on conditions."

As to Russia and Poland, we were brusquely told to mind our own business:—

"The Entente States having refused to join in the negotiations within the period agreed upon by Russia and the four Allied Powers, I must decline, in the name of the latter, any subsequent interference. The question here involved is one which alone concerns Russia and the four Allied Powers.

It was not the Entente—who found nothing but meaningless



words for Poland and before the War never mediated on her behalf with Russia—but the German Empire and Austria-Hungary who freed Poland from the Tsaristic régime which was oppressing her national individuality. Therefore, it must be left to Germany and Austria-Hungary and Poland to come to an agreement about the future organisation of that country. We are, as has been proved by the negotiations and declarations of the last year, well under way with the task.”

But his treatment of Belgium was a final blow to any hope of peace:—

“As far as the Belgian question is concerned it has been declared repeatedly by my predecessors in office that at no time during the War has the forcible annexation of Belgium by the German Empire formed a point in the programme of German politics. The Belgian question belongs to a complicity of questions, the details of which will have to be regulated during the peace negotiations. As long as our enemies unreservedly adopt the attitude that the integrity of the territory of the Allies offers the only possible foundation for peace negotiations, I must adhere to the standpoint which, up to the present, has always been taken, and must decline any discussion of the Belgian question until the general discussion takes place.”

Italian claims he treated as a question entirely for Austria. We shall see later on what Austria had to say about them. The fate of Arabs in Mesopotamia and Arabs and Jews in Palestine was a matter entirely for the Turks. The Turks said nothing on the subject.

It is evident both from Hindenburg's letter and Hertling's speech that the Germans were in no mind to discuss any tolerable peace. They were full of the assurance of victory. Hertling's real attitude is revealed towards the end of his speech:—

“May they believe me when I state that our military situation was never so favourable as it is now. Our highly gifted Army leaders face the future with undiminished confidence in victory. Throughout the whole army, in the officers, and in the men, lives the unbroken joy of battle.”

The Supreme War Council held at Versailles on the 2nd February, 1918, reviewed the whole of these Peace Declarations. As a result of the discussion it was decided to issue a joint declaration embodying the results of the session of the Council. This was published in the Press of the Allied countries on 4th February and included the following paragraph:—

"The Supreme War Council gave the most careful consideration to the recent utterances of the German Chancellor and of the Austro-Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs, but was unable to find in them any real approximation to the moderate conditions laid down by all the Allied Governments. This conviction was only deepened by the impression made by the contrast between the professed idealistic aims with which the Central Powers entered upon the present negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, and the now openly disclosed plans of conquest and spoliation. Under the circumstances, the Supreme War Council decided that the only immediate task before them lay in the prosecution with the utmost vigour, and in the closest and most effective co-operation, of the military efforts of the Allies, until such time as the pressure of that effort shall have brought about in the enemy Governments and peoples a change of temper which would justify the hope of the conclusion of peace on terms which would not involve the abandonment, in face of an aggressive and unrepentant militarism, of all the principles of freedom, justice and the respect for the Law of Nations which the Allies are resolved to vindicate."

But if the statement of our peace aims set out in my speech of 5th January had brought forth no favourable public response from the Central Powers, one of their most important Ministers—Count Czernin, the Austrian Foreign Minister—secretly harboured and expressed more kindly thoughts of our proposals. Very soon after the delivery of my speech there was a renewal of the approaches to us from Austria.

Our Minister at Berne received a message that Count Czernin wished to meet me in Switzerland. The Minister had indirectly received a communication from a highly-placed Austrian who had paid a visit to Switzerland in order to convey the message to Sir Horace Rumbold. This Austrian official's diagnosis of the position has an interest of its own. It was set out in a telegram from Sir Horace Rumbold, dated 11th January, 1918, of which the following is a paraphrase:—

"M. de Skrzynski yesterday visited Geneva for an interview with Dr. Parodi. According to his statement, there were in the addresses recently delivered by Mr. Lloyd George and by President Wilson a number of points about which there was agreement between the Government of His Majesty and that of Austria-Hungary. There were various other matters in addition referred to, apart from these points, where it seemed that further discussion might well lead to a satisfactory understanding. The comments of a section of the Vienna Press upon the views of Mr. Lloyd George must not be taken by H.M. Government as

representative of the views of Count Czernin or of the mass of the people. A part of the Press of Austria-Hungary, and nearly all the Press of Germany is controlled by munitions manufacturers, and these raise an outcry the moment they observe a glint of peace beginning to dawn. Count Czernin, so M. de Skrzynski proceeded to say, has been compelled to maintain a titanic struggle at Berlin in order to secure the adoption of his "no annexations" formula. Count Hertling, on the day when a declaration to this effect was made by Kuhlmann, had hardly dared to leave his dwelling, fearing that the mob in the Berlin streets would hiss him.

A section of the German public is utterly fanatical in supporting militaristic projects of annexation, but there is also a powerful body of Pacifist opinion, which is bound to exert considerable influence.

As a price for securing the adherence of Germany to his formula, Count Czernin was compelled to agree to dispatch certain Austro-Hungarian regiments to the Western Front in order to display the solidarity of Austria with Germany. The military aid thus promised was two or three regiments, and these are already in Belgium or about to proceed thither. It is suggested as desirable by M. de Skrzynski that in commenting upon this the Entente Press should not attach much importance to the military assistance thus rendered, since Germany is really getting it as a sort of blackmail. As regards Turkey, the Austro-Hungarian Government thinks that a formula might be devised which would assure a considerable degree of autonomy to Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine without ostensibly depriving Turkey of any territory. In any event M. de Skrzynski stated that if Mr. Lloyd George was willing to have an interview with Count Czernin, the latter would come to Switzerland to meet him."

The Cabinet was doubtful as to the wisdom of my accepting the invitation. A meeting of two Prime Ministers from the opposing Powers to discuss Peace was necessarily a more formal occasion and would attract much more attention than private conversations between a Minister and an ex-Ambassador. Besides, Czernin had not answered the question put to Mensdorff as to whether Austria was prepared to negotiate a separate peace. Personally I was strongly in favour of keeping up these communications with Austria. If they came to anything we should have one foe the less to fight. If they did not, even then it would have the effect of making the Austrians less inclined to antagonise the Western Powers by sending troops to fight them in France. So I urged the Cabinet that we should take advantage of every overture which might lead to a



separate peace with Austria, and might reduce the Austrian Army to the same state of impotent inactivity as the Russian Army had been in during 1917.

It was decided that the opportunity for any serious request for peace *pourparlers* ought not to be ignored, and it was resolved to send a member of the War Cabinet to meet Count Czernin. Messages passed to and fro for weeks, but no meeting could be arranged until late in February. The negotiations made no headway. Czernin was tricky, and our Foreign Office very sticky. The reluctance of the latter to press matters to a conclusion was due to their suspicions of the genuineness of Czernin. They thought he was playing a deep game for Germany. It was clear that he was deceiving one side or the other. If his messages to us were sincere then he was deceiving Germany. If his speeches represented his real intentions then he was playing with us. The truth of the matter probably was that the Austrian Government were pulled in both directions and that they were thoroughly distracted. On the one hand, there was the dread of approaching doom from which they wanted to escape; on the other hand, there was the fear of a powerful Germany which enchained them with infrangible steel. It was finally agreed that General Smuts should once more go on his errand of peace and proceed to Switzerland to ascertain the exact meaning and scope of these overtures, whether Count Czernin was actually behind them and, if so, the general line of his proposals.

General Smuts again took with him Mr. Philip Kerr, and they reached Berne on 9th March. At first it appeared as if there had been a complete change in the Austrian attitude and that at last they were prepared to confine the discussions strictly to the problems of an Austro-Hungarian peace. It seemed as if this time the Austrians meant to get out of the War with or without their allies. They were convinced that the War was being prolonged owing to Prussian annexationist ambitions, and they were prepared, once they had negotiated a separate peace, to leave the orbit of Prussian influence, and remodel their institutions on federal lines. Mr. Kerr, being of a naturally hopeful disposition, and being also young and therefore with his belief in human nature not yet vitiated by experience, at first took a sanguine view of the proposals and in a telegram to me from Berne on the situation, said:—

“ . . . I think that, subject to what Skrzynski may say, very great results might follow from a conversation between Czernin and a British negotiator as to a possible settlement between Austria-Hungary and the Entente, provided that it were absolutely clear that we were not prepared to discuss terms with Germany at all. It is possible that it might end in the three

Southern Allies of Germany coming out together. Nor do I see any real danger can follow unless discussion leads to discord with our own Allies, or unless it fails because an agreement cannot be reached because our terms are unreasonable. In latter event Czernin would go back and re-unite his people on the ground that Entente were impossibly greedy. It therefore seems to me essential that if the Czernin meeting is to take place we should discuss basis of a separate Austro-Hungarian peace with our Allies including Serbia as soon as possible because if anything is to come of a meeting with Czernin he ought to be in a position to reach a preliminary understanding on the spot if he himself is reasonable. . . ."

General Smuts was instructed that he could go ahead on these lines. He had a long conversation with M. de Skrzynski in the course of which the Austrian emissary expressed the fear on Czernin's part that the Entente were simply endeavouring to detach Austria-Hungary in order to isolate and defeat Germany. General Smuts assured him that what the Entente were after was a settlement on terms which would bring about a just and lasting peace everywhere, with a prospect of general disarmament. He added that unfortunately the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and with Roumania were not, in the eyes of the Entente, in keeping with these principles.

The position at which the exchange of views was left on 14th March, 1918, was that if any conversation was to take place it would be for the purpose of arriving at a settlement of all questions outstanding between Austria-Hungary and the Allies, the *principle of settlement being not the bargaining of territory against territory but that justice must be done to all peoples*. On no other basis was it possible to construct a lasting peace. It was understood that the meetings would proceed to discuss the practical application of this agreed principle to the matters in dispute between Italy, Serbia, Roumania and Austria-Hungary, and that inasmuch as certain internal racial questions vitally affected international relations and therefore the possibility of lasting peace, these questions could not be excluded from discussion. It was also clearly understood that the Allied Governments would refuse to be drawn into a discussion of peace terms with Germany.

General Smuts, however, drew one other inference from his meeting with Skrzynski, that between the time when the meeting was first suggested and his actual arrival in Switzerland, a change had once more taken place in the attitude of Count Czernin, and that his eagerness for *pourparlers* with the Entente had diminished in that space of time. This is explained in the conclusions which were set out after the interview in a memorandum by Mr. Kerr:—

"... In the first place it may be due to the effect of the collapse of Russia before the German advance, coupled with the improved military situation of Germany in the West. Count Czernin may have decided that his best policy was to abandon separate negotiations and see what terms military necessity or a new peace offensive against the civilian populations of the Allies might force us to give him. In the second place the change of attitude may be explained by the opening of the negotiations with America. Czernin may have made up his mind that it would be easier to do business via America because the U.S.A. was not tied to Italy by Treaty, and would therefore be more likely to stand out for moderate terms, and also because the U.S.A. was the Power from which Austria-Hungary could probably get most financial assistance. In the third place, Count Czernin may have begun to realise that once he entered into a conversation with a British plenipotentiary he would be unable to draw back owing to the pressure in favour of peace from popular opinion inside the monarchy, and that once begun the negotiations would inevitably lead on either to a separate peace or to the break-up of the monarchy owing to internal divisions in regard to peace. If so, especially in view of the extreme obscurity of the political situation of the moment, and possibility of a growing realisation of the difficulties which confronted him as he got near the brink of negotiation, Count Czernin may have been merely concerned to gain time, and to avoid committing himself to a meeting which was bound to have fateful consequences. On this hypothesis which is consistent with M. de Skrzynski's explanation of the change in Count Czernin's attitude, my arrival must have put him in great difficulties. He had indeed no alternative but to temporise."

The proximity of the March offensive, and no doubt the confidence expressed by the German Staff in its success had damped the Austrian ardour for peace. In this temper no business was possible, and when in a few days the great attack was made and prospered, all question of the continuation of peace conversations was ruled out. All that came of these *pourparlers* was the hesitancy of Austria to throw her army into the deadly struggle in the west. It may be of some interest, not untinged with regret to conjecture what might have been the effect on the settlement of Europe if peace had been concluded with Austria in the spring of 1918. The Austrian Empire would have remained; instead of breaking up into a number of independent States, not always friendly to the Central authority, there would have been perhaps half a dozen autonomous dominions all owing allegiance to the Austrian Crown and working harmoniously together for their common interests. As for Germany,



we received no direct or indirect intimation of her desire for peace except on terms that were not even debatable. The Germans meant to fight it out unless they got terms that would leave them better off territorially and economically at the end of the War than they were at the beginning. The militarists dare not march back to Berlin after signing a peace which was an admission that they were beaten. It was their war and they meant to end it with banners flying. They meant to try one big gamble for such a victory as would enable them to ensure their own terms. Ludendorff urged the politicians at home to support the offensive of his army by an elaborate peace offensive that would undermine the morale of the English nation and make it less eager to put all its strength into the fight. He complained that these politicians were not helping him as they ought to do by a peace propaganda that would weaken and divide the enemy peoples. That was his sole motive for our peace talk.

## APPENDIX I

REPORT OF MR. PHILIP KERR'S INTERVIEW WITH DR. PARODI,  
HEAD OF THE MISSION SCOLAIRE EGYPTIENNE, ON DECEMBER  
18TH, 1917.

### (a) PREFATORY NOTE BY GENERAL SMUTS

THE Prime Minister asked me before leaving London to look into the Turkish position so far as material was available in Switzerland. Dr. Parodi of Geneva had had several conversations with members of the Turkish Red Cross Mission now in Switzerland and had gathered very interesting information in regard to divergent views in the Committee of Union and Progress. He had also had numerous conversations with many other Turks recently. As I was very busy with the Mensdorff conversations I asked Mr. Philip Kerr, who accompanied me from London, to go into the whole matter with Dr. Parodi, and Mr. Kerr has prepared a note summarising Dr. Parodi's information and views hereto annexed (a) which discloses the line of cleavage in the C.U.P. and suggests a line of diplomatic action for us in order to get Turkey out of the War.

I also sent Mr. Kerr to Berne to discuss the whole matter with Sir Horace Rumbold, as I could not myself go there without grave risk of my presence in Switzerland being detected. Mr. Kerr discussed the matter with Sir Horace Rumbold and thereafter again with me, and in consequence a memorandum has been drafted annexed (b) of which a copy has been left with Sir Horace Rumbold and in which a line of action is suggested for our endeavours to induce the Turks to make a separate peace. If the War Cabinet approves of this document a telegram sent to Sir Horace Rumbold will enable him to set the whole business going without further delay. Or in the alternative, action may be taken on the document with such modifications as the Cabinet may consider advisable. The whole matter has been carefully discussed with Dr. Parodi who strikes me as a man of considerable ability and discretion, and I have no doubt that he will prove very useful to Sir Horace Rumbold in the preliminary and informal stages of the business. Sir Horace Rumbold awaits Foreign Office instructions in order to take action. Action should not be delayed as Mouktar Bey, who is at the head of the Turkish Red Cross Mission now in Switzerland,

is expected to return to Turkey at the end of the year. He is said to be a friend of Talaat's with leanings towards a settlement with the Entente and may be a useful man with whom to have a preliminary informal conversation.

20th December, 1917.

J. C. S.

(b) MR. PHILIP KERR'S REPORT

Dr. Parodi says that the Committee of Union and Progress is divided into two parts—the larger and the Germanophile, the smaller more disposed towards the Entente and especially Great Britain. The most active leader of the Germanophile section is Enver Pasha. Enver is a pure militarist Germanophile, having no ideas for the future save that Germany will win the War and recover the Turkish Empire, of which he then will be Dictator or Sultan. Talaat also belongs to this section, but is now in an uncertain frame of mind and ready to go with the winning side. He thinks that Germany will neither be victorious nor beaten and that there will be a *paix blanche* more or less on the basis of the *status quo*. On this assumption there is no sufficient reason why Turkey should break with Germany. He listens to what the smaller section of the Committee—the Ententophile—says, does not oppose them, but does not act on their opinion.

Turkey is in a very bad way economically but except for the Committee of Union and Progress, there is nobody capable of taking the initiative at all. The opposition in Europe is powerless because it has no connections or friends inside Turkey. Any movement must, therefore, come from the opposition within the Committee itself. There is no other organised force in Turkey save the Committee, and its force rests on the officers of the Army.

The views of the opposition within the Committee are something as follows: They are getting more and more afraid of Turkey becoming a German province, and are more and more embittered by the arrogant manners and despotic methods of the Germans. To save Turkey from falling completely under German control, they would like to cut free from Germany and lean on England, which they say has always been a friend to Turkey, if they could get moderate terms. The greatest obstacle in their way is the fact that the Germanophile section is able to point out persistently that whereas Germany is pledged to the restoration of the Turkish Empire, the Entente is committed to dismembering it. A number of well-known Turks, e.g., Djemal Pasha, surgeon of the Sultan, Lufti Bey Fikri, député d'Adana, Kamal Bey, and others have all within the last month or two told Dr. Parodi that while they dislike intensely the German connection and can hardly endure to live in Turkey because of it, and that while they greatly fear for the future of Turkey under German control, and are entirely sympathetic to the Entente and



especially Great Britain, it is useless and impossible for them to oppose the existing régime because they have no answer to the Germanophile propaganda that whereas the Germans are pledged to recover the Empire, the Allies are pledged to destroy it.

According to Dr. Parodi the Ententophile section is prepared to consider a settlement on something like the following lines:—

(a) ARABIA. That Turkey should acknowledge the complete political independence of the Kingdom of Hedjaz and of the rest of Arabia. The Ententophile section of the Committee recognise that they have failed to govern Arabia properly, and that even if it were possible for them to keep it, it would prove an intolerably burdensome and expensive possession. They are willing, therefore, to concede its complete independence. It could be formed either into the Kingdom of Hedjaz, and a number of independent Sheikdoms, or the latter could be federated. As to the Caliphate the Party is divided. Some would let the King of the Hedjaz have it, others want it for the Sultan. The division apparently follows the line of cleavage between the Pan-Turanian and the Pan-Islamic schools. They would want tribute, however, from Arabia in order to enable the Turkish treasury to make both ends meet.

(b) SYRIA, MESOPOTAMIA, PALESTINE. The Ententophile section of the Committee would be prepared to see these established as autonomous provinces either as separate entities or federated together under the Turkish flag. The autonomy to be real; either a form of Government chosen by the people themselves, or a system of Administration, through European advisers, as in Egypt before the War. The flag, however, must be preserved as the symbol of the unity of the Turkish Empire, and a tribute to be paid to the Ottoman Treasury as in the case of Hedjaz.

(c) ARMENIA. The Ententophile section of the Committee recognise the utter failure of the Turkish Government in Armenia, are ashamed of its record of assassination and atrocity and are willing to leave the fate of Armenia to be entirely decided by the European Powers. In order to facilitate this they are willing to transfer the Kurds from Armenian villayets into a separate Kurdish villayet.

(d) CONSTANTINOPLE. As to Constantinople it must remain Turk. On this they lay the utmost stress, and it would have the most enormous moral effect in Turkey if it became known that the Allies would be willing that Constantinople should remain Turkish. The Allied declarations which still hold the field are those of Miliukoff. These have never yet been amended. They also wish for a strategic rectification of their frontier towards Bulgaria. They are extremely bitter about the part they surrendered to Bulgaria as the price of getting her into the War and

fiercely demand it back. As to the Straits, Bosphorus and Dardanelles, they would agree that they should be neutralised—a special International Commission to be appointed to control the waterway, quays, etc. They would dismantle the forts and make no new ones within a certain radius.

In order to enable the opposition to make any headway it is essential, according to Dr. Parodi, that the Allies should let the C.U.P. (the whole Committee including Talaat and Enver and not merely the opposition) know the Allied views in regard to Turkey. If the Allied views are moderate and anything like those outlined above it will give the moderate section the arguments they require for propaganda in the C.U.P., the Army and elsewhere, and thereby enable them to get control over the Organisation.

A communication of the views of the Allies could be made through a suitable source to Mouktar Bey, who is now in Switzerland as President of the Commission about the exchange of prisoners, and who will remain here till about 1st January, and who could probably be induced to stay longer if necessary. The communication should be made in this form; a suitable agent who could speak as one friendly to Turkey should inform Mouktar Bey that the views of the Allies in regard to Turkey are not extreme, that he has the best of reasons in fact for believing that the sort of terms they would be prepared to consider are so and so, and that if Talaat and the Committee wish to know what the views of the Entente are in regard to the future of Turkey they should make a request for information through an official channel when an official reply would be sent.

The effects of a moderate declaration by the Allies—which would be immediately known through the branches of the C.U.P.—would be (a) to stimulate and give sound arguments to the Ententophile propaganda within the Committee; (b) to hearten the Arabs in Arabia, Syria, Mesopotamia and Palestine by showing that the aim of the Entente was to secure them autonomy; (c) to further the antagonism between the Arab officers and troops within the Army and the Turkish officers and troops and so lower the morale of the army itself.

If the Ententophile section gained the ascendancy (probably through the murder of Enver) they believe they could deal with the German troops and officers in Turkey themselves. The C.U.P. is strong enough for that. But they fear a Bulgarian attack, and if there was any chance of the Revolution against German control taking place it would be necessary for the Entente to have ships and troops ready to rush through to Constantinople via Dardanelles or Smyrna.

There is one further point. The Ententophile section is much concerned over the financial problem. They owe about £300,000,000

to the Germans. So long as they owe this they cannot live as an independent power. They will simply be concession-ridden and in German hands. They want the Allies to help them in this matter, and also to give them a loan to enable them to reorganise Turkish finances. They also want agricultural machinery, etc., so as to raise food. Not the least of the inducements to the Turks to make a separate peace is the prospect of having the economic support of the Entente powers. They can only recover with outside assistance. German assistance means German control. If they could see their way to making a fresh start in close relations with the Entente it would be a great inducement to them to make an immediate peace.

I arranged with Sir Horace Rumbold that subject to confirmation by telegram from London, Dr. Parodi should cause a communication in the following sense to be made unofficially and verbally to Mouktar Bey. The communication to take the form of a conversation between Mouktar Bey and a friend to Turkey who had exceptional means of knowing the views of the Allies. The exact method to be left to the discretion of Dr. Parodi.

1. That in view of the military reverses which had been already sustained by Turkey and of the tremendously strong position held by the Allies *vis-à-vis* the Central Powers, not merely militarily, but owing to their command of the economic resources of the world, a position which was bound to become steadily stronger, the Allies were by no means inspired by the hostile intentions attributed to them by the German propagandists, but were on the contrary moderate in their views and were quite prepared that Turkey should occupy an adequate place among the peoples of the world, provided she was willing to break immediately with Germany and make peace with the Allies.

2. That in the event of an immediate peace the Allies would be prepared, provided the Dardanelles, Sea of Marmora and the Bosphorus were neutralised, that Constantinople should remain the capital of Turkey. Neutralisation to consist of the dismantlement of all forts and the withdrawal of troops within a certain distance of the waterway, and the handing over of the control of the waterway between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and of any quays and docks which might be necessary to an International Commission, as in the case of the Suez Canal.

3. That the Allies were determined that the Administrative Authority of the Turks must be entirely withdrawn from Armenia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Arabia, so that the inhabitants of these territories might conduct autonomous governments of their own, or be governed by a mixed system of local and European officials under the protection of one or more of the Allied Powers, as has been the case in Egypt. As to the international status of



these territories, Armenia and Arabia would have to be entirely separated from the Turkish dominions. In the case of Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia, however, the Allies might be willing in the event of an immediate peace, to consider the retention of the Turkish flag as the symbol of Turkish suzerainty, provided it carried with it no executive authority.

4. That the Allies would be willing to free Turkey of the debt incurred in respect of the above-mentioned territories, to give liberal financial and other economic assistance to Turkey to enable her to make a fresh start, and to free herself from the German economic incubus, and so go forward as one of the states in friendly relations with the Entente group of powers, which is bound to be the strongest in the world.

NOTE.—Negotiations in regard to peace between Turkey and the Allies to be inaugurated upon the receipt of a private official enquiry from the Turkish Government, or any highly-placed Turkish statesman or official of authority, which would be made via the British Legation, Berne, to the effect that the Turkish Government or such statesman or official was anxious to know the conditions which the Allies would propose for an immediate peace with Turkey. A method of communication could then be arranged.

19th December, 1917.

P. H. K.

## APPENDIX II

### THE PEACE DECLARATION: MR. LLOYD GEORGE'S SPEECH TO THE TRADE UNIONS, 5TH JANUARY, 1918

WHEN the Government invite organised labour in this country to assist them to maintain the might of their armies in the field, its representatives are entitled to ask that any misgivings and doubts which any of them may have about the purpose to which this precious strength is to be applied should be definitely cleared, and what is true of organised labour is equally true of all citizens in this country without regard to grade or avocation.

When men by the million are being called upon to suffer and face death and vast populations are being subjected to the sufferings and privations of war on a scale unprecedented in the history of the world, they are entitled to know for what cause or causes they are making the sacrifice. It is only the clearest, greatest and justest of causes that can justify the continuance even for one day of this unspeakable agony of the nations. And we ought to be able to state clearly and definitely not only the principles for which we are fighting, but also their definite and concrete application to the war map of the world.

We have arrived at the most critical hour in this terrible conflict, and before any Government takes the fateful decision as to the conditions under which it ought either to terminate or continue the struggle, it ought to be satisfied that the conscience of the nation is behind these conditions, for nothing else can sustain the effort which is necessary to achieve a righteous end to this war. I have, therefore, during the last few days taken special pains to ascertain the view and the attitude of representative men of all sections of thought and opinion in the country. Last week I had the privilege not merely of perusing the declared war aims of the Labour Party but also of discussing in detail with the Labour leaders the meaning and intention of that declaration. I have also had an opportunity of discussing this same momentous question with Mr. Asquith and Viscount Grey. Had it not been that the Nationalist leaders are in Ireland engaged in endeavouring to solve the tangled problem of Irish self-government, I should have been happy to exchange views with them, but Mr. Redmond, speaking on their behalf, has, with his usual lucidity and force, in many of his speeches, made clear what his

ideas are as to the object and purpose of the War. I have also had the opportunity of consulting certain representatives of the great Dominions Overseas.

I am glad to be able to say as a result of all these discussions that although the Government are alone responsible for the actual language I propose using, there is national agreement as to the character and purpose of our war aims and peace conditions, and in what I say to you to-day, and through you to the world, I can venture to claim that I am speaking not merely the mind of the Government but of the nation and of the Empire as a whole.

We may begin by clearing away some misunderstandings and stating what we are *not* fighting for. We are not fighting a war of aggression against the German people. Their leaders have persuaded them that they are fighting a war of self-defence against a league of rival nations bent on the destruction of Germany. That is not so. The destruction or disruption of Germany or the German people has never been a war aim with us from the first day of this war to this hour. Most reluctantly and, indeed quite unprepared for the dreadful ordeal, we were forced to join in this war in self-defence, in defence of the violated public law of Europe, and in vindication of the most solemn treaty obligations on which the public system of Europe rested, and on which Germany had ruthlessly trampled in her invasion of Belgium. We had to join in the struggle or stand aside and see Europe go under and brute force triumph over public right and international justice. It was only the realisation of that dreadful alternative that forced the British people into the War. And from that original attitude they have never swerved. They have never aimed at the break-up of the German peoples or the disintegration of their country or Empire. Germany has occupied a great position in the world. It is not our wish or intention to question or destroy that position for the future, but rather to turn her aside from hopes and schemes of military domination and to see her devote all her strength to the great beneficent tasks of humanity. Nor are we fighting to destroy Austria-Hungary or to deprive Turkey of its capital, or of the rich and renowned lands of Asia Minor and Thrace, which are predominantly Turkish in race.

Nor did we enter this war merely to alter or destroy the Imperial constitution of Germany, much as we consider that military autocratic constitution a dangerous anachronism in the twentieth century. Our point of view is that the adoption of a really democratic constitution by Germany would be the most convincing evidence that in her the old spirit of military domination had indeed died in this war, and would make it much easier for us to conclude a broad democratic peace with her. But, after all, that is a question for the German people to decide.

It is now more than a year since the President of the United States,



then neutral, addressed to the belligerents a suggestion that each side should state clearly the aims for which they were fighting. We and our Allies responded by the Note of the 10th January, 1917.

To the President's appeal the Central Empire made no reply, and in spite of many adjurations, both from their opponents and from neutrals, they have maintained a complete silence as to the objects for which they are fighting. Even on so crucial a matter as their intention with regard to Belgium they have uniformly declined to give any trustworthy indication.

On the 25th December last, however, Count Czernin, speaking on behalf of Austria-Hungary and her allies, did make a pronouncement of a kind. It is indeed deplorably vague. We are told that "it is not the intention" of the Central Powers "to appropriate forcibly" any occupied territories or "to rob of its independence" any nation which has lost its "political independence" during the War. It is obvious that almost any scheme of conquest and annexation could be perpetrated within the literal interpretation of such a pledge.

Does it mean that Belgium, Serbia, Montenegro and Roumania will be as independent and as free to direct their own destinies as the Germans or any other nation? Or does it mean that all manner of interferences and restrictions, political and economic, incompatible with the status and dignity of a free and self-respecting people, are to be imposed? If this is the intention then there will be one kind of independence for a great nation and an inferior kind of independence for a small nation. We must know what is meant, for equality of right among nations, small as well as great, is one of the fundamental issues this country and her Allies are fighting to establish in this war. Reparation for the wanton damage inflicted on Belgian towns and villages and their inhabitants is emphatically repudiated. The rest of the so-called "offer" of the Central Powers is almost entirely a refusal of all concessions. All suggestions about the autonomy of subject nationalities are ruled out of the peace terms altogether. The question whether any form of self-government is to be given to Arabs, Armenians, or Syrians is declared to be entirely a matter for the Sublime Porte. A pious wish for the protection of minorities "in so far as it is practically realisable" is the nearest approach to liberty which the Central statesmen venture to make.

On one point only are they perfectly clear and definite. Under no circumstances will the "German demand" for the restoration of the whole of Germany's colonies be departed from. All principles of self-determination, or, as our earlier phrase goes, government by consent of the governed, here vanish into thin air.

It is impossible to believe that any edifice of permanent peace could be erected on such a foundation as this. Mere lip service to the formula of no annexations and no indemnities or the right of

self-determination is useless. Before any negotiations can even be begun, the Central Powers must realise the essential facts of the situation.

The days of the Treaty of Vienna are long past. We can no longer submit the future of European civilisation to the arbitrary decisions of a few negotiators striving to secure by chicanery or persuasion the interests of this or that dynasty or nation. The settlement of the new Europe must be based on such grounds of reason and justice as will give some promise of stability. *Therefore it is that we feel that government with the consent of the governed must be the basis of any territorial settlement in this war.* For that reason, also, unless treaties be upheld, unless every nation is prepared at whatever sacrifice to honour the national signature, it is obvious that no Treaty of Peace can be worth the paper on which it is written.

The first requirement, therefore, always put forward by the British Government and their Allies, has been the complete restoration, political, territorial and economic, of the independence of Belgium and such reparation as can be made for the devastation of its towns and provinces. This is no demand for a war indemnity such as that imposed on France by Germany in 1871. It is not an attempt to shift the cost of warlike operations from one belligerent to another, which may or may not be defensible. It is no more and no less than an insistence that before there can be any hope for a stable peace, this great breach of the public law of Europe must be repudiated, and, so far as possible, repaired. Reparation means recognition. Unless international right is recognised by insistence on payment for injury done in defiance of its canons it can never be a reality. Next comes the restoration of Serbia, Montenegro, and the occupied parts of France, Italy and Roumania. The complete withdrawal of the alien armies and the reparation for injustice done is a fundamental condition of permanent peace.

We mean to stand by the French democracy to the death in the demand they make for a reconsideration of the great wrong of 1871, when, without any regard to the wishes of the population, two French provinces were torn from the side of France and incorporated in the German Empire. This sore has poisoned the peace of Europe for half a century, and until it is cured healthy conditions will not have been restored. There can be no better illustration of the folly and wickedness of using a transient military success to violate national right.

I will not attempt to deal with the question of the Russian territories now in German occupation. The Russian policy since the Revolution has passed so rapidly through so many phases that it is difficult to speak without some suspension of judgment as to what the situation will be when the final terms of European peace come to be discussed. Russia accepted war with all its horrors because,

true to her traditional guardianship of the weaker communities of her race, she stepped in to protect Serbia from a plot against her independence. It is this honourable sacrifice which not merely brought Russia into the War, but France as well. France, true to the conditions of her treaty with Russia, stood by her Ally in a quarrel which was not her own. Her chivalrous respect for her treaty led to the wanton invasion of Belgium; and the treaty obligations of Great Britain to that little land brought us into the War.

The present rulers of Russia are now engaged without any reference to the countries whom Russia brought into the War, in separate negotiations, with their common enemy. I am indulging in no reproaches; I am merely stating facts with a view to making it clear why Britain cannot be held accountable for decisions taken in her absence, and concerning which she has not been consulted or her aid invoked. No one who knows Prussia and her designs upon Russia can for a moment doubt her ultimate intention. Whatever phrases she may use to delude Russia, she does not mean to surrender one of the fair provinces or cities of Russia now occupied by her forces. Under one name or another—and the name hardly matters—these Russian provinces will henceforth be in reality part of the dominions of Prussia. They will be ruled by the Prussian sword in the interests of Prussian autocracy, and the rest of the people of Russia will be partly enticed by specious phrases and partly bullied by the threat of continued war against an impotent army into a condition of complete economic and ultimate political enslavement to Germany. We all deplore the prospect. *The democracy of this country means to stand to the last by the democracies of France and Italy and all our other Allies.* We shall be proud to fight to the end side by side with the new democracy of Russia, so will America and so will France and Italy. But if the present rulers of Russia take action which is independent of their Allies we have no means of intervening to arrest the catastrophe which is assuredly befalling their country. Russia can only be saved by her own people.

We believe, however, that an independent Poland, comprising all those genuinely Polish elements who desire to form part of it, is an urgent necessity for the stability of Western Europe.

Similarly, though we agree with President Wilson that the break-up of Austria-Hungary is no part of our war aims, we feel that, unless genuine self-government on true democratic principles is granted to those Austro-Hungarian nationalities who have long desired it, it is impossible to hope for the removal of those causes of unrest in that part of Europe which have so long threatened its general peace.

On the same grounds we regard as vital the satisfaction of the legitimate claims of the Italians for union with those of our own race and tongue. We also mean to press that justice be done to men



of Roumanian blood and speech in their legitimate aspirations. If these conditions are fulfilled Austria-Hungary would become a Power whose strength would conduce to the permanent peace and freedom of Europe, instead of being merely an instrument for the pernicious military autocracy of Prussia that uses the resources of its allies for the furtherance of its own sinister purposes.

Outside Europe we believe that the same principles should be applied. While we do not challenge the maintenance of the Turkish Empire in the homelands of the Turkish race with its capital at Constantinople—the passage between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea being internationalised and neutralised—Arabia, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine are in our judgment entitled to a recognition of their separate national conditions.

What the exact form of recognition in each particular case should be need not here be discussed, beyond stating that it would be impossible to restore to their former sovereignty the territories to which I have already referred.

Much has been said about the arrangements we have entered into with our Allies on this and on other subjects. I can only say that as new circumstances, like the Russian collapse and the separate Russian negotiations, have changed the conditions under which those arrangements were made, we are, and always have been, perfectly ready to discuss them with our Allies.

With regard to the German colonies, I have repeatedly declared that they are held at the disposal of a Conference whose decision must have primary regard to the wishes and interests of the native inhabitants of such colonies. None of those territories are inhabited by Europeans. The governing consideration, therefore, in all these cases must be that the inhabitants should be placed under the control of an administration acceptable to themselves, one of whose main purposes will be to prevent their exploitation for the benefit of European capitalists or Governments. The natives live in their various tribal organisations under chiefs and councils who are competent to consult and speak for their tribes and members, and thus to represent their wishes and interests in regard to their disposal.

The general principle of national self-determination is therefore applicable in their cases as in those of occupied European territories. The German declaration, that the natives of the German colonies have, through their military fidelity in the War, shown their attachment and resolve under all circumstances to remain with Germany, is applicable not to the German colonies generally, but only to one of them, and in that case (German East Africa) the German authorities secured the attachment, not of the native population as a whole, which is, and remains, profoundly anti-German, but only of a small warlike class from whom their Askaris, or soldiers, were selected. These they attached to themselves by conferring on them a highly

privileged position as against the bulk of the native population, which enabled these Askaris to assume a lordly and oppressive superiority over the rest of the natives. By this and other means they secured the attachment of a very small and insignificant minority whose interests were directly opposed to those of the rest of the population, and for whom they have no right to speak. The German treatment of their native populations in their colonies has been such as amply to justify their fear of submitting the future of those colonies to the wishes of the natives themselves.

Finally, there must be reparation for injuries done in violation of international law. The Peace Conference must not forget our seamen and the services they have rendered to, and the outrages they have suffered for, the common cause of freedom.

One omission we notice in the proposal of the Central Powers, which seems to us especially regrettable. It is desirable, and indeed essential, that the settlement after this war shall be one which does not in itself bear the seed of future war. But that is not enough. However wisely and well we may make territorial and other arrangements, there will still be many subjects of international controversy. Some indeed are inevitable.

The economic conditions at the end of the War will be in the highest degree difficult. Owing to the diversion of human effort to warlike pursuits, there must follow a world-shortage of raw materials, which will increase the longer the War lasts, and it is inevitable that those countries which have control of the raw materials will desire to help themselves and their friends first.

Apart from this, whatever settlement is made will be suitable only to the circumstances under which it is made, and, as those circumstances change, changes in the settlement will be called for.

So long as the possibility of dispute between nations continues, that is to say, so long as men and women are dominated by passionate ambition, and war is the only means of settling a dispute, all nations must live under the burden not only of having from time to time to engage in it, but of being compelled to prepare for its possible outbreak. The crushing weight of modern armaments, the increasing evil of compulsory military service, the vast waste of wealth and effort involved in warlike preparation, these are blots on our civilisation of which every thinking individual must be ashamed.

For these and other similar reasons, we are confident that a great attempt must be made to establish by some international organisation an alternative to war as a means of settling international disputes. After all war is a relic of barbarism, and, just as law has succeeded violence as the means of settling disputes between individuals, so we believe that it is destined ultimately to take the place of war in the settlement of controversies between nations.

If, then, we are asked what are we fighting for, we reply, as we

have often replied: We are fighting for a just and a lasting peace, and we believe that before permanent peace can be hoped for three conditions must be fulfilled.

First, the sanctity of treaties must be re-established; secondly, a territorial settlement must be secured based on the right of self-determination or the consent of the governed; and, lastly, we must seek by the creation of some international organisation to limit the burden of armaments and diminish the probability of war.

In these conditions the British Empire would welcome peace, to secure those conditions its peoples are prepared to make even greater sacrifices than those they have yet endured.



## CHAPTER LXXI

### BOLSHEVISM CONQUERS RUSSIA

THERE are two of the direct consequences of the War which have already exerted a palpable influence on the course of human affairs and will continue to do so more and more as the years roll by. One is the establishment of the League of Nations—the other is the Russian Revolution. The question whether the Russian Revolution will have as great an effect on the lives of the people in all countries as had the French Revolution, or an even greater, will be determined by one eventuality: it will depend on whether its leaders can keep their movement in the paths of peaceable development or whether its energies will be wasted and its purpose deflected by war. If Russia remains at peace then the Revolution will become one of the greatest factors in fashioning the destiny of the masses in all lands which mankind has ever witnessed or experienced.

Those of us who had entertained the hope that the Russian Revolution would consolidate and reinvigorate the fighting strength of Russia in the last War came reluctantly to recognise as time went on how incalculable is the course of all revolutions. The rot in Russia had gone too far, and had eaten too deeply into the existing organisation of the Russian State to be cured by bandaging the sore at a clearing station under gunfire. The Provisional Government, which had ruled Russia since the abdication of the Czar, thought temporary remedies could be applied to Russia's wounds in order to send her back to the fighting line. That Government fell at the end of May because it was so completely out of touch with realities.

It is no use saying now that if the Russian reformers had thrown up one strong man and placed him in command, then events would have taken a different turn. Often the strong man in a revolution is not the person who initiates it, but the man who subsequently exploits it. Events precipitate a situation, personalities fashion its shape and direct its course.

There are those who contend that no personality, however powerful he may be, can ordain the course of events, or change them except transitionally. Their interpretation of great historical upheavals is that the times are ripe for certain happenings and that they would occur even if a great man had not appeared on the scene and pulled the lever which precipitated them. This always seems to me to be a

misreading of history. There have been occasions in which a man of power has postponed, if not averted, a catastrophe which seemed imminent and was ultimately inevitable. There have also been times when a strong man has accelerated changes which but for him would have been long postponed. Nations become static just as individuals sink into indolence. In that condition they both deteriorate. A strong influence may shake them up and thus save them. Lvoff and Miliukoff could not have directed the Russian Revolution. Neither could Kerensky. It might have ended in utter anarchy and the break-up of Russia into countless small and warring states fighting about undefined frontiers, or it might have culminated in another military dictatorship. Russia was accustomed to the sovereignty of brutal soldiers. Korniloff very nearly established such an autocracy. Lenin, with the aid of Trotsky, averted these calamities and directed Russia through chaos, bloodshed, and suffering into an amazing Reformation which, if it succeeds, may yet change the whole economic conditions of the world.

The one really powerful personality thrown up by the Russian Revolution was more concerned about overthrowing the existing order of society than about defeating the Germans. Lenin was an exile from Russia when the Revolution broke out. The first reforming leaders were not anxious to welcome his presence. He owes his return to the facilities provided by the German military authorities who thought that he would be an element of discord in Russia and thus help to break up Russian unity. Their calculation was sound. But what a price Germany has paid and is still paying for a short-lived triumph! It is difficult to take long views in war. Victory is the only horizon. It is a lesson to the statesmanship which takes short-sighted views of a situation and seizes the chance of a temporary advantage without counting the certainty of future calamity.

Soon after the Revolution broke out the shadow of the tremendous figure of Lenin began to rise above the horizon. It fell on the green table of Downing Street for the first time in a despatch from Sir George Buchanan, who wrote as follows: —

“Petrograd,

30th April, 1917.

As you will have seen from my telegrams the situation here continues in much the same state of uncertainty as before and it is impossible to say what may happen from day to day. If one listens to Ministers one hears that all is going well and that the Government is gradually consolidating its position; while, if one takes the opinion of those who are in touch both with the Government and the Workmen's Council, one gets exactly the opposite impression. A battle royal seems to be proceeding between Kerensky and Miliukoff on the famous formula ‘Peace without annexation,’ and, as the

majority of Ministers are, according to all accounts, on Kerensky's side, I should not be surprised if Miliukoff has to go, as he remarked the other day that he would be a traitor were he to give in on the subject of Constantinople. He would be a loss in many ways as he represents the moderate element in the Cabinet and is sound on the subject of war; but he is not a strong man and has so little influence with his colleagues that one never knows whether he will be able to give effect to what he says. If he does go there is no saying who his successor will be, but I trust that it will in any case be someone who can speak with authority in the name of the Government.

The Government is still playing a waiting game and prefers that the initiative in dealing with Lenin should come from the people, rather than that they themselves should give the order for his arrest. They are probably right, as the feeling against Lenin is growing stronger both among the soldiers and the people, I should not indeed be surprised if things came to a crisis during the May Day celebrations to-morrow. If there is to be a row, and perhaps more street fighting, I would sooner that the crisis came at once so that we may get it over and that the country may be able to give more attention to the War. The military situation is no doubt very unsatisfactory; but there are, I think, signs of improvement and the Russians have such a happy knack of getting out of scrapes, that I personally do not take such a pessimistic view of it as some of our experts who judge it more particularly from the deplorable lack of discipline reported from certain points on the front. I am afraid, however, that the Army will not be able to take the offensive so soon as some of the Ministers had led me to believe. This is to be regretted, as the sooner the fighting begins the better it will be for the internal situation.

It is most difficult to express an opinion on the relative positions of the Provisional Government and the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies. The latter is being completely reorganised. Its numbers have been reduced to 600 and a new Executive Committee has been appointed. The effect of this reorganisation will be to render it more moderate, but at the same time, a stronger body. It is not therefore likely to renounce its claim to control and direct the policy of the Government, but if it is really animated by a greater spirit of moderation it may perhaps work more harmoniously than before with the Provisional Government. On the other hand, the possibility of a conflict between the two rival bodies cannot altogether be excluded. It seems that the former Extremist Members, who are not included in the reorganised Council, are going to set up a Committee of their own and I trust that, as I remarked to Miliukoff yesterday, this does not mean that there will be three instead of two rival Governments. I do not think that the Council is likely to press for an early peace; but it will



probably give us a good deal of trouble as to the terms on which the Allies ought to accept peace and as to the interpretation to be placed on the word 'annexation.' The chief danger that I foresee is the not improbable eventuality of Germany putting forward plausible conditions of peace, as such overtures might be seized on by the pacifists here and pressure be brought on the Government to induce the Allies to open peace negotiations. . . .

They are now attacking our Labour Delegates as being paid emissaries of the Government and not real representatives of British labour. It is very difficult to know what to do with people who stick to their preconceived ideas and will not listen to reason. . . ."

Here is some light thrown on the scandal-mongering in high places which was a prelude to the poor Czar's downfall. It did much to bring about the Revolution: —

"Felix Yousoupoff, who came to see me the other day with a message from the Empress Marie, told me that he knew as a fact that the Emperor had been treated by a Thibetan Doctor here with drugs that had seriously affected his mental powers. He had himself been taken by Rasputin to see this Doctor one day when he was feeling unwell, and, on the question as to the effect of these drugs being broached by Rasputin, the Thibetan had said that, if taken for any length of time, they produced in the patient a state of callousness and complete insensibility to anything that befell him. Yousoupoff said that he had afterwards extracted from Rasputin the admission that the Emperor had had a course of these drugs, and he believes that they are in a great measure responsible for the Emperor's abnormal conduct and almost childish indifference to the loss of his Crown. He could not say who it was that had induced the Emperor to take them; but the idea had evidently originated with someone who wished to render the Emperor incapable of having a will of his own. I have been told much the same story by the Grand Duke Nicolas Michailovitch and others and after what Yousoupoff said I think there must be some foundation for it."

The letter reads like a despatch from Paris after the fall of the Bastille, when gossip about the tragic Royalties of the day was becoming more and more calumnious and when Marat and Robespierre were profiting by it to challenge the Girondists with their respectable revolution.

Kerensky was a man of high ideals, but he had a highly-strung and nervous temperament. Like the Girondists he was endowed with an unsurpassed gift of dynamic eloquence which moved vast audiences to any display of emotion he sought to arouse. But he

relied too much on oratory and did not follow it by deeds. Rhetoric which does not lead to action is mere play-acting. This defect foredoomed him to failure when he was confronted with men whose first impulse was action. It marks the difference between the rhetorician and the revolutionary. The situation needed a man of a sterner make than Kerensky. One of the shrewdest observers we sent to Russia, General Knox, who was at the head of Russian affairs at this time, thought that "the heart of the people was sound, but that force was required, and force could have been assembled if the Government had contained a single man of will." As Lenin represented at that time only a minority of the workers and practically none of the peasants, General Knox's view is probably correct.

The Allies were anxious to give the Russian Government every help in their power to stabilise its position at home and to reconstitute its front towards the enemy. They believed that even now a whole-hearted and sympathetic effort on their part to give Russia practical support would rally and unite her people, and keep her in the War as an effective fighting force.

But the powerful forces that were at work against us were irresolutely grappled with by the Provisional Government. Lenin, Zinovieff and others had arrived at Petrograd in April via Germany, and throughout the early summer of 1917 their influence was gradually gaining in power, while the discipline in the Russian Army was as steadily diminishing.

Here is a picturesque but discerning account of the situation from a British officer who wrote from Cronstadt at this time of perplexity and confusion:—

"... Just at the moment the industrial situation is grave. Skobelev, the Minister of Labour, delivers himself of declarations which read like a nightmare of undigested terminology. Confiscation of bank surpluses, whatever that may mean, being the latest on Friday; the Minister of Commerce, Konovaloff, resigned in a demonstration against him, saying that it was impossible to maintain output or financial equilibrium in face of the unchecked demands of the workpeople. Under occidental conditions Skobelev would be a State-control man and Konovaloff a Manchester Liberal, as far as I can make out. Unfortunately, just now there is in Russia no State to control anything. Men are striking for 100 per cent. rises retrospective to the beginning of the War, for six-hour days, for six months' payment in advance. One firm has been confronted with a demand for increases which amount to about 20 per cent. more than its capital. The same firm had been making a profit of 40 per cent.

All our domestic troubles with labour are here seen magnified; prices four times the normal and profits accordingly. Wages two

and a half times the normal and therefore forcing up prices without overtaking them. To this add fraud and corruption on one side and the complete absence of any organisation on the other. Two years of paper money (they are said to be issuing another 2,000 million roubles) and two months of revolution complete the tale, which is one of simple disintegration.

As for politics, take this as an instance. Cronstadt has proclaimed itself as an independent republic. At the bottom of this remarkable act was apparently nothing more than a simple belief in the wisdom and beauty of decentralisation which happened to be the word in vogue. The Republicans were genuinely shocked when the Commandant said that being an officer of the Government he must go; they explained that they didn't want him to go, so why should he? All yesterday the rumour was that they were going to bombard us; Socialist deputations trickled down all day to give them their first lessons in Political Science. To-day the current account is that the Government was going to attack Cronstadt with an army according to some, with destroyers according to others. There is to be a railway strike next week. I am trying hard to find out whether in all this welter there is anything like a Labour Executive in the Council; the Commercial Attaché thinks there is a kind of clearing house through which the demands of the workpeople are passed. If there is, then with Skobelev vague but fervently determined to do something and a Labour group actually collating the workpeople's unrestrained desire for a good time, there may be something for Henderson to work on. Next to strike and Cronstadt, the great topic of discussion is peace v. offensive. I am inclined to think that the policy of the Government is to coax the people into a summer offensive in the hope that peace will then slip into the background. I am not hopeful. Everyone is clear that Russia is sick of the War. The only other thing they are clear on is that in Russia you never know what will happen next and several people have told me that Petrograd is even sicker of the existing state of affairs. Next time, they say, the Cossacks will shoot. . . ."

Contemporary letters written by experienced and observant men who were passing through the experiences of the first weeks of the Revolution threw a valuable light not merely on this particular convulsion, but on the process by which discontent develops into revolution through unwise and ineffective handling.

On 15th June, just before Kerensky's assumption of office, our Ambassador wrote:—

"... The situation in Petrograd is as bad as ever, which is hardly to be wondered at seeing that there is no proper police



force to maintain order; and the uncertain attitude of the troops causes the Government considerable anxiety. There are, however, signs of a reaction, not in favour of a monarchy, but of a stable Government capable of maintaining order and putting an end to the existing anarchy that is steadily spreading over the country. The Government, has, I am convinced, only to act with firmness and it will have the mass of the people behind it. From what Terestchenko tells me, they consider that the psychological moment has arrived for action and, if he really represents their views, they are going to get rid of the Petrograd garrison and employ the Cossacks, who can be thoroughly relied on, should the occasion arise. The result of the recent municipal elections shows that the Extremists are but a small minority and their position is likely to be seriously compromised if, as he hopes, Terestchenko is able to prove that many of their leaders are in German pay. The convocation of an all-Russian Conference of Delegates from all the Workmen's Councils in Russia, which is to meet in a day or two, will be a new and interesting factor in the situation. It will transform the local Council into a national one and invest it with greater authority and influence. It is generally expected that the admission of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies from the provinces will act in a moderating sense, and if this proves to be the case there will be closer co-operation between the Council and the Government. . . .

As regards the Army the outlook is more hopeful, though the pessimists declare that it is quite incapable of taking an offensive. Ministers, on the other hand, speak with considerable confidence and an offensive will, in my opinion, be certainly undertaken as soon as the difficulties of supplies, etc., have been surmounted, but with what measure of success it will be attended is a matter on which I will not venture to prophesy. . . .

Since writing the above I have seen the Chief of the General Staff who told me that the latest information from the front was far more satisfactory, and that the offensive would be taken within the next fortnight. . . ."

Another letter, written from another source on 24th June, ran as follows:—

"We had another crisis on 22nd-23rd June which most people thought would not be surmounted without serious bloodshed. The 'Bolsheviki' called on all their followers to make an armed demonstration against the Government, who had allied themselves with the capitalists and were responsible for the War and all the misery entailed by it. Leaflets of an even more inflammatory kind were distributed inciting to open violence.

Fortunately the Government had just been reinforced by votes of confidence from the All-Russian Council of Labour and Soldiers' Delegates and the All-Russian Peasants' Congress; and those two bodies, backed by the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Council and all the Socialist organisations, issued counter-proclamations requesting everyone to stay at home. The Government forbade all demonstrations for three days, and even the *Pravda* and the *Novaia Zhizn* supported them. The result was that yesterday was perfectly quiet and to-day, Sunday, looks as if it would be the same. . . .

The possible result may be imagined. It seems to me that the longer bloodshed is put off the more chance there is of avoiding it and all its incalculable results. A few judicious arrests would be another matter when the Government feel that the time is ripe. . . .

Terestchenko attaches the greatest importance to not weakening the Salonika Front at present, as you know, and wants the whole thing thrashed out at Paris. . . . At the moment of writing, it looks as if an offensive really would take place, but the results it is quite useless to try to foresee. Most people think that a failure will be a disaster. There is no doubt that the Army at the front is in a better state than it was; but the divisions vary terribly in their 'morale' and few have their heart in the business.

. . . Most people think it out of the question that the Russian troops will consent to pass another winter in the trenches, whatever the higher command may desire. It does not follow that this is correct and it won't, probably, be clear till September whether it is so or not; but the contingency must be considered. If it proves correct, the question arises whether it would not be desirable in the general interest that Russia should make peace before she is overwhelmed—especially if Austria were at the same time to drop out. I know the enormous difficulties in the way of this arrangement, and I do not think that, at the present moment, the Russian Government would listen to a proposal of the kind. Nevertheless, I draw your attention to it because I have for some time been trying to think of the best way out of our difficulties in the event of a general dissolution of the Russian Army under the influence of the first snows."

At the beginning of July, in spite of their internal difficulties, the Russian Army under General Brussiloff, took the offensive against the Germans and in one place succeeded in breaking through the enemy lines to a depth of seven miles over a front of 14 miles. In the course of the whole offensive they took 26,000 prisoners and 84 guns.

But the offensive was not sustained. The army did not want to

fight. Discipline had disappeared. On 10th July, General Knox sent a despatch in which he described the offensive and indicated the extent to which indiscipline prevailed throughout the whole of the Russian Army and the general collapse of morale. The demoralisation and disintegration seems to have started in the lower ranks of the Army—the result of dissatisfaction with conditions which had prevailed since the beginning of the War, and before.

Here is a description of the fight by General Knox:—

“There were evidences of indiscipline everywhere. Every bivouac of a mounted unit was full of horses galloping backwards and forwards untied, every village full of horses tied up without food in the sun for hours while their owners slept or attended meetings. No one seemed to do a full day's work except the company cooks. The roads near the front were in a disgraceful state and no one made an attempt to repair them, while the men spent the day in bathing and lying drying in the sun. No observation post that I saw was properly defended and many of them were not even properly concealed. Most of the mechanical transport was handed over to ‘delegates,’ who seem now to have priority over the staff and the service of supply.

Most of the staffs were changed a short time before the action. All the corps commanders and most of the divisional commanders had been changed in the past three months.

However, all the regular officers that have survived the War and Revolution worked heroically to stem the tide of socialistic cowardice and to restore order out of chaos. . . .

The operations were postponed two days to allow of the arrival of the Minister of War, who brought with him the proclamation of the All-Russia Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies calling on the troops to take the offensive. Kerensky spent his first day in the 11th Army and had a bad reception in the 2nd Guard Infantry Division, half of the men of which refused to give him a hearing. No one really knew whether the infantry would attack, few of the units were actively mutinous, but almost every division had one bad regiment. The cavalry and artillery were sound. . . .

The infantry, with the exception of some few regiments, commenced well. . . .

Progress, however, was much interfered with by the indiscipline and stupidity of the men. The left regiment of the 16th Division had been allotted a passive task. . . .

The observation posts were crowded by correspondents, army delegates and idle soldier spectators who hampered the officers at work. . . .

At 2 p.m. I went to the headquarters of the 7th Army, where I sat in the General Quartermaster's room and got a general idea



of progress. All were then in good spirits, but from 3 p.m. the picture began to change.

The 74th Division was making no progress and complained of heavy gun-fire from its left. The Commander-in-Chief, who was with Kerensky, telephoned that many men of this Division were streaming to the rear, and ordered that all available delegates be dispatched at once to hearten them. The 'delegate' is now looked upon as the universal panacea, but he is not half so effective as were the subaltern's boot and fist in former times. . . .

The retirement can only be explained by the miserable morale of the infantry. The men were impressed by an artillery fire to which they had been little accustomed and they went as far as the enemy's trenches had been destroyed. They had lost many of their officers and had no incentive to further effort; in fact, they knew that further progress would be attended by risk, while they could retire without fear of being punished. To dig themselves in was too much trouble, so they went back to their old ready-made defences. . . .

The 81st Czech Regiment surrendered *en bloc* to the VIth Corps and the next day marched to the rear through Tarnopol headed by its band.

The Russian losses were given officially two days later—17,339 killed, wounded and missing.

. . . The Chief of Military Communications of the South-West Front superintended the evacuation of the wounded from Kozova on the 1st July. He states that in a train of 850 cases he considers that only some 15 men were really wounded; the remainder were wounded in the hands, and he suspected that many of the wounds were self-inflicted.

On the night of the 1st July, the 19th Siberian and 23rd Divisions of the XXXIVth Corps and the Corps Staff were withdrawn on relief by the IIInd Guard Corps. The units of the XL1st Corps gave it to be understood that they would not attack again. The 7th Army has not moved since.

Now simply on account of the disaffection in this Corps the whole advance of the 11th Army had to stop on the 3rd, 4th and 5th.

Morale and discipline—Kerensky has appointed 'commissaries' to each army to assist in the maintenance of discipline. These men are all hall-marked revolutionaries. Most of them have spent several years in penal servitude. The commissary of the 11th Army was six years in Siberia; the one in the 7th Army, Savinkov, was the chief organiser of the murder of the Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich, since which he has lived in Switzerland. They are both working with courage, and in complete agreement with the Command to re-establish orders.

I was struck by the terrible position of the officers in one of the Finland Regiments visited. They were mere boys who had just joined from the military schools. They were all anxious to do their best, but found themselves at once the object of wholly unmerited suspicion.

During some trench negotiations on the Northern Front recently some German officers came over, and there was an informal discussion regarding the causes of the War. The Russian and German officers, of course, disagreed, but a Russian soldier said that he preferred the word of a German officer to that of a Russian one. In taking leave the German officers told the Russians that they were 'really sorry' for them, for their 'position was dreadful.'

The Polish Division has been hastily filled by Catholic recruits from Volhynia and Podolya. Its discipline is bad, and it refused for some weeks to go near the front. Its commander, General Simon, though a Pole, asked to be transferred to serve with Russian troops, as he could 'do nothing with the Poles.' The Division has now been weeded out. Company commanders pointed out to the Commissary the men they wished to get rid of. For instance, one company leader said, pointing out one of his men: 'One night on the march I mistook the road and led the company 40 yards out of its way. I overheard this man say to the company: "Gentlemen, I suggest we throw this son of a pig into the river".'

The Commander of the 1st Division of the Guard told me that his officers were martyrs suffering daily tortures. Some nights ago a company commander of the Yegerski Regiment was riding along with his command when his men called to him through the darkness to get off, as they did not see why a 'bourgeois' should ride when they walked. When he dismounted the men at once began to consider whether he had not better ride so as to be able the quicker to get them billets when they arrived at their destination. He mounted again, and they again required him to dismount. This officer cannot have been much good, but after all he was only following the example set by his superiors in yielding to the men in everything.

It is impossible to avoid the uncomfortable conclusion that the war in Russia is coming more and more to be regarded as a secondary matter. . . .

General Klembovski, the Commander-in-Chief of the Northern Front, is reported by several papers to have said in a recent speech at Riga, that the present offensive was all-important because a winter campaign was impossible, and all the combatants would soon begin negotiations for peace.

Kerensky works hard as Minister of War, but his speciality is revolution, and he does not yet altogether grasp that the only way to cause revolution in Germany is to defeat her army in the

field. Even at the front, half his attention is directed to Stockholm. On the 1st July, three German prisoners, the first taken, were led past his observation post. He sent to ask them—not what troops were on their right and left and rear—what political party they belonged to and whether there would soon be a revolution in Germany. They replied they did not belong to any political party. They did not know anything about the interior of Germany, but at the front where they had been all the War there was no sign of a revolution.

I was sitting with the General Quartermaster of the 7th Army at Buchach the day before we moved up to the front for the offensive, when two members of the Petrograd Council of Working Men and Soldier Deputies were announced. They had come to lecture on two things, War and Peace and the Constituent Assembly.

Ensign Krilenko, an anti-war socialist, stated in a speech delivered to the Committee of the 11th Army that he had organised a plebiscite in the 13th Finland Regiment regarding the course of action to be followed by Russia in three eventualities:—

1. If the Allies abandoned all claim to annexations, but Germany did not.
2. If both the Allies and Germany refused to abandon the idea of annexations.
3. If the Allies refused to abandon the claim to annexations but Germany agreed to do so.

The reply, he stated, was in each case 'war,' but in the third case 'war against the Allies.'

This man calmly contemplates war against the world and maintains that the worst that could befall Russia would be the loss of the Caucasus, Finland, Siberia and Poland. He professed to believe in the existence of secret treaties between England and Germany.

Most officers shudder at the idea of a fourth winter of war. They often quote Hindenburg's remark about nerves and confess that Russian nerves have been the first to give way.

Korniloff told me that he considered the offensive the last chance, and that the economic condition of Russia and the breakdown of the railways will make the continuation of the War through a fourth winter impossible. The Report of the American Railway Commission on these matters will be of interest.

The opinion of Ignatiev, who now commands the 1st Division of the Infantry of the Guard, is worth quoting, for he is capable and generally a cheery optimist. He is a younger brother of the Count Ignatiev, late Minister of Education, and their father was the Ambassador at Constantinople.



He considers that peace is essential for Russia, for if there is not peace soon there will be a general massacre. The prolongation of the War is driving the country to economic ruin. From the very beginning the peasants had hated the War, which was only at first popular with the educated classes. He said, 'If you were to go out into the square now, and to announce that the War will end at once on the one condition that Nikolai Romanov return to power, everyone would at once agree, and there would be no more talk of a democratic republic.' (I believe this is true. The Revolution has been a revolt against the burden of the War, and not a protest, as the English Press at first tried to pretend, against the half-hearted way in which the late Government prosecuted the War.)

I asked Ignatiev whether the reconsideration of the terms of peace would have any effect on Russian public opinion. He said it would on conscientious people, but the mass of the soldiery only wanted an excuse for saving their skin. They belonged neither to the party of the Bolsheviki nor to that of the Mensheviki, but were 'Skurniki'\* pure and simple, i.e. 'fearers for their own skin.'

I pointed out that if by any chance Germany were not beaten as she deserved it would be entirely Russia's fault. He agreed and said he fully expected that no foreigner would speak to a Russian for the next twenty years. In England's place he would get out of the War as soon as possible while there was yet time. . . ."

At the Inter-Allied Conference in Paris on 25th and 26th July we took stock of the Russian position, in view of the disturbing news from that front. It was quite clear that the situation had got completely out of hand as far as Kerensky and his Government were concerned. The abolition of the death penalty, and to a great extent the impotence of the officers to inflict any other punishment for indiscipline, had made it impossible to deal with desertion and even with insubordination. But it is doubtful whether any penalties would have re-established discipline. The probability is that their infliction would have precipitated open mutiny. The position of Kerensky was indeed desperate. He had to stimulate and organise the Armies in the field, which were rapidly disintegrating into an incoherent rabble, whilst simultaneously he had to confront seditious risings and rebellions in and around his own capital. All the time, the Bolsheviks were plotting to undermine his authority as soon as he thought he had re-established it. Was ever man more precariously situated? It needed a leader of dominating power and decision to control and direct such a situation. Kerensky was a man of genius, but it was not the genius of action.

At the Paris Conference, the British representative put forward a

\* Skura—A Skin.

memorandum containing suggestions for giving help to Russia which were as follows: —

“ . . . The Allied Governments should make every sacrifice in order to retain Russia in the Alliance, and, by affording her constant support in every department, to infuse into her Government the energy necessary to hold out at all costs. . . .

To carry out this programme, France, Great Britain and the United States, the only powers in a position to act in Russia, should come to an agreement without delay to determine the part to be assigned to each of them.

Questions of propaganda in the interior of the country, and of financial and economic help are matters for the Government concerned, and are not treated in the present Memoranda.

From the point of view of military and economic help it would seem that the activities of the Allies might be distributed as follows: —

England will attend to the Navy.

France to the Army.

United States to the reorganisation of transport.

In this task of reorganisation, Japan could, perhaps, co-operate by furnishing material or technical labour.”

The military Conference which met on 26th July was attended by Generals Cadorna, Robertson, Pershing, Pétain and Foch. Their statement was an indication of the grave consequences which they apprehended would ensue from the desertion of the Allied cause by Russia: —

“ The fall of Russia would entail the following consequences: —

*Political.* It would modify the political aims of the Entente. It is, therefore, suggested that the Governments should at once consider and decide what would be the new political aims to be pursued.

*Economic.* It would place at the disposal of the Central Powers the vast resources of Russia, especially grain, and thereby greatly minimise the efficiency of the blockade.

*Morale.* It might result, especially in the case of the smaller Allies in the Balkans, in a profound depression which might cause them to seek a separate peace. It is practically certain that Roumania would be compelled to share the fate of Russia and that, in consequence, the Bulgarian forces, and even a certain number of Turkish divisions, might be free to augment the forces at the enemy's disposal.”

Events were marching very fast in Russia—too fast for control by a divided and flaccid Ministry. Most of the Ministers were able men but there was no agreement amongst them and there was no compelling personality to direct and unite them in a coherent effort. A crisis arose in Petrograd over the recognition of autonomy for the Ukraine, and four Ministers of the Cadet Party resigned. There were disorders and fighting in Petrograd. The effect of the news from the capital upon the troops at the front was devastating. They practically abandoned trenches, guns and ammunition to the Germans without striking a blow.

Whilst the Paris Conference was in session, a despatch was on its way to us from our Ambassador in Petrograd which gave a vivid account of the chaos reigning there, and of the outbreak of disorders and rebellion that, although for the moment suppressed, were destined to recur and increase until the last remnants of order and government melted away in a sea of anarchy.

Sir George Buchanan's message, dated 23rd July, 1917, describes how, on hearing of the resignation of the four Cadet members of the Government on the 16th, he had gone to visit Terestchenko, one of the leading Ministers, whom he found laid up with internal trouble. Terestchenko was querulously indignant at the desertion of the Cadets, instigated by Miliukoff, over the Ukrainian question which broke up the Coalition Government, but he evidently had no inkling of the storm of riot and civil conflict that was imminent in the capital. Indeed, the story told in this graphic letter illumines once more the historic truth that successful revolutions are generally due to the obtuseness of able but unimaginative men in authority, who quarrel amongst themselves about trivial repairs, improvements and decorations to the building while the whole fabric is tottering to a complete crash. Terestchenko here was worrying about Constantinople, and Miliukoff about Ukrainian autonomy, when the whole structure of Russia was collapsing into flaming fissures.

Buchanan's letter goes on to relate how that very evening motor lorries and cars filled with armed soldiers and machine-guns began to pour into the streets of Petrograd. Presently a long procession formed:—

“It was composed of a large number of workmen and three regiments—all fully armed—with banners bearing the usual inscriptions—‘Down with the Ten Capitalistic Ministers’; ‘Down with War’; ‘Give us Bread,’ etc. The majority marched across the Champ de Mars into the town. We soon afterwards heard shots at the back of the Embassy and many of the crowd bolted for safety down the quay. There was rifle and machine-gun firing in many quarters of the town during the greater part of the night. A number of motor cars filled with soldiers went



to the Warsaw station to arrest Kerensky, but fortunately only got there a quarter of an hour after he had left. Others went to Prince Lvoff's official residence to arrest him and some of his colleagues, who were holding a council there. Their courage, however, failed them, and though there were no troops on guard there, the disloyal troops, on being invited to enter and talk to the Ministers, feared that a trap was being laid for them and contented themselves with requisitioning the Ministers' motor cars. . . ."

Cossacks were held in readiness by the Government, but were not actually used to restore order and the streets were full of crowds and troops engaged in faction fighting. On the following day, things looked blacker, for several thousand sailors arrived from Cronstadt, now a hotbed of Bolshevism—indeed, Trotsky describes the Cronstadt sailors as the "fighting crusaders of the Revolution." There was another monster procession, and more street fighting. And Buchanan wrote thus:—

"On this Tuesday afternoon I really was afraid that the Government would have to capitulate, as they were really at the mercy of the disloyal troops, had the latter had an ounce of courage and been properly led. The Cossacks and a few loyal regiments who came out to protect the Government saved the situation. As it was, Tchernoff, the Socialist Minister of Agriculture, was roughly handled by the disloyal troops and temporarily arrested. While we were at dinner the Cossacks charged the Cronstadt sailors, who had gathered in the square by the Embassy, and sent them flying for their lives. The Cossacks then marched up the quay, but a little later got caught in a cross-fire and suffered heavy losses. We saw several riderless horses returning at full gallop, and a little later two Cossacks who were bringing back a prisoner were attacked by some soldiers under our windows and nearly murdered."

The despatch describes the further course of the disorders and how they were gradually got under. The next day, Wednesday, was comparatively quiet, and on Thursday the main bodies of mutinous troops were rounded up. Friday saw fresh sporadic outbreaks, and then a temporary calm supervened. Buchanan notes the close connection of this rebellion with the progress of the German campaign. He says:—

"There can be no doubt that this so-called counter-revolution—a term which everybody interprets in his own sense—was engineered by the Germans to synchronise with their offensive.

The news of what was passing in Petrograd was circulated among the troops at the front by German aeroplanes and by Bolshevik agitators, and the collapse of the Russian Army would never have been so complete but for this. On the other hand, the Russian reverse—serious as it is, more especially from the point of view of the abandonment of heavy artillery, guns and military supplies—has secured for the Government the full support of the Soviet and of the Socialists, who have now given them full powers to put down indiscipline in the army and anarchy at home. . . .”

Buchanan was optimistic—unduly so, as events were to prove. He thought that this rebuff to the Bolsheviks would be permanent.

“It is always difficult in this country to look far ahead; but in spite of the disastrous news from the front I take a more hopeful view of the situation as a whole than I have for some time past. Though the industrial, economic and financial situations are all serious, there is at last some prospect of orderly Government, even if a little time must elapse before we feel its effects. So long as anarchy reigned supreme one could not expect any real or lasting improvement, but the restoration of order ought to react favourably on all branches of the national life. . . .”

Unhappily, the restoration of order was far from being achieved. There was no stable foundation upon which it could be built. That scene of wild chaos on the 16th and 17th July which Buchanan has so graphically described—leaderless mobs that seethed to and fro, insurgent troops marching to arrest members of the Government, street fighting and irresponsible murder—illustrated the state of Russia at the time. Except for the Cossacks, there was no force available that could be relied on to obey orders; and on the side of the Government there was no one with the authority, vision and firm grasp needed for suppressing revolt and compelling unity and order. The only man in Russia strong enough for that task was on the other side.

Buchanan clearly recognised how much depended in this crisis upon the quality of leadership which might be forthcoming. He goes on in his despatch to outline the form the reconstituted Government will take, and to comment on its prospective members:—

“Tseretelli is apparently to be Minister of the Interior, but Terestchenko tells me that he is too much of an idealist for the post, and that he is not likely to retain it for long. Nekrassoff, who is to act as President of the Council when Kerensky is away, does not inspire confidence, as he is too much of an opportunist

and has changed parties more than once in order to advance his own interests. His ambition is to become Prime Minister. He is, however, a capable and strong man. Of the other Socialist Ministers, Skobeleff and Tchernoff are the most influential. From all I hear the former is too flighty and not very intelligent, while the latter is said to be very able but quite untrustworthy. Prince Lvoff told a friend of mine yesterday that he regarded him as the most dangerous man in the revolutionary movement."

Jealousies, rivalries and squabbings on the rim of the crater! No wonder they fell in and dragged with them the cause they all cherished. How little these Girondists, all suspicious of each other, knew of the really dangerous men who were lying in wait for all of them! They were under the impression that they had now disposed of Lenin and his mob of fanatics, and they only feared reformers in their own ranks—and the abler these were, the greater their distrust. They were jealous of the ambitions of Nekrassoff, alarmed at the socialist projects of Tchernoff. Soon they were broken by the ruthless directness of Lenin, the ruthless methods of Trotsky. The conclusion of our Ambassador's despatch tells of the movements that were being started in Russia to establish its future Government on the English model. He repeats a remark of Prince Lvoff to the effect that Russia would have a Constitutional Monarchy before the year was out. This struck Buchanan as symptomatic of that change of heart and revulsion against extreme Socialism which he hoped to see. He concluded that:—

"We should have a monarchy again in a very few months if only there was any eligible candidate to the throne, and I do not know of anyone likely to command the suffrages of the nation."

There was, in fact, such a man in Russia, and before long he was wielding a power more terrible than that of any Czar. But he was not a Romanoff. Neither Lvoff nor Buchanan had looked for a monarch among the Bolsheviks. Our Ambassador soon realised that Russia was not being swung in the direction of Constitutionalism.

On 4th August our Military Attaché wrote:—

"... The country is moving straight to ruin as things stand at present. During past fortnight no real steps have been taken to re-establish the prestige of the officers and discipline amongst troops in rear. Till discipline is established in rear and troops are made to fight it is impossible to look for any improvement in the army at the front. Till discipline is established in the army,



it is impossible to force the men in the railway repair shops and the mines to work, and if they continue as at present, a general breakdown of railway transport in the winter and a famine at Petrograd and in the army will occur. Kerensky is at present the only man with any magnetic influence amongst the Ministry who has not yet understood the necessity of discipline.

None of his immediate military advisers are men of character. Socialists want to run a class war in preference to the race war, and this appeals to the mass of the soldiers as being less dangerous.

Tseretelli and others think they can run both wars simultaneously. We have to tell Russian Government plainly that this is impossible."

And on the 6th came another telegram from him: —

"General Staff Officer complained apparently of coldness of England's attitude. He said that our opinion carries more weight than that of any other Ally. He suggested statement in Parliament of sympathy with Russia in her difficulties, with a delicate hint that, while we were ready to make any sacrifice to help Russia with a strong Government, our duty to ourselves and our other Allies might make us question the advisability of helping a Government that delayed to take necessary steps to restore discipline."

On the 5th August, General Korniloff, an excellent soldier who for some months had been in disgrace as a result of his criticisms of the Government for being, as he thought, guilty of weakness in dealing with the Army, was reinstated as Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armies in the place of General Brussiloff. He was not *persona grata* in the eyes of the Soviet Government, who regarded him rather in the light of a counter-revolutionary, but on his appointment as Commander-in-Chief the attacks on him were modified. Kerensky agreed to give Korniloff a free hand.

Sir William Robertson said that he had great hopes that this appointment would lead to the restoration of discipline and the regeneration of the Russian Army. In spite of this, however, pessimistic reports continued to come from Petrograd, and we were told that it would be useless to expect any further military assistance from Russia in 1917. The Allies were attempting, with the aid of a technical Railway Mission from the United States, to reorganise the Russian railways, as the difficulties of transport in Russia seemed to be one of the chief causes of the trouble. But the Russian temperament is not, or at least was not in those days, helpful in putting things on a business basis. It turned out that the Mission, through no fault of its own, was utterly unable to cope

with the situation. The pre-War Russian at his best never shone as an organiser. When he became inebriated with revolutionary sentiment he was useless for the common tasks of an ordered society. Intoxication is no corrective for inefficiency.

At the Inter-Allied Conference on 8th August the Russian situation came up for discussion, and the following telegram was sent to the Russian Government: —

“The Representatives of the Allied Governments met in London on 7th August greet with heartiest sympathy the bold effort of reorganisation which the Provisional Government and its leader are carrying on in Russia.

They note with satisfaction that in this tragic hour all forces of Russia are consolidated around the Government to reinforce its power and that the popular will expressed from day to day in more definite forms and through a more complete representation, proclaims loudly the necessity of national defence.

They send their heartiest greeting to M. Kerensky and his colleagues and express firm confidence in their controlling authority and in the re-establishment of a strict discipline which is clearly indispensable to all armies, but above all to the armies of free nations. It is by discipline that the Russian Army will secure alike popular liberty, national honour and the realisation of the war aims which are common to all the Allies.”

On 7th September, however, the War Cabinet again reviewed the position, and considered an appeal for more guns for Russia. They decided that “the supply of guns was part of the general question as to whether we were to continue to support Russia in view of the lack of discipline that prevailed in the Army of that country and the serious economic situation there.” At this same Cabinet meeting General Knox, who had just returned from Russia, gave an account of the position in that distracted country. He said that:—

“... There were three powerful forces tending to drive the Russians to make a separate peace.

The great mass of the soldiers did not want to fight. They had not wanted to fight before the Revolution, but had been forced on by their officers. There had been frequent cases of indiscipline before the Revolution; now they were quite general.

In the second place, workmen were making huge economic demands on their employers, and British manufacturers were closing factories and moving away. It was expected that there would shortly be a general lock-out. The workmen had probably enough money to last them for a month; after that time, there would be a state of anarchy. The Government had

repeatedly promised to organise a militia or police force in Petrograd and Moscow, but nothing had been done.

The third force was the confusion on the railways. There was an enormous surplus of grain in the Caucasus, but the level at which the price of bread had been fixed was not such as to tempt the peasants to part with their grain. Nor would cash purchases at high prices attract them. They preferred to barter grain for goods which they actually wanted, such as agricultural implements and calico.

Force would have to be applied if the grain was to be forthcoming. The harvest in the Volga governments had been a failure, and to bring the grain from the Northern Caucasus and Western Siberia was very difficult owing to the condition of rolling stock. In June, 1916, 18 per cent. of the engines were under repair; in June, 1917, 24 per cent.; and the number was increasing at the rate of 2 per cent. per week. The average number of days per month worked in some of the repairing shops was only 13. . . .

In reply to questions as to the likelihood of a *coup d'état*, headed by General Korniloff, General Knox said that he did not know what preparations were being made. When he left Russia, on the 18th August, Korniloff and Savinkoff were in agreement. Korniloff was a strong character, an honest patriot, and the best man in sight. He had the support of the Cossacks. They numbered 1,000 squadrons of 150 each. He (General Knox) had no faith in Kerensky. . . . Kerensky was afraid of shedding blood and was allowing matters to drift towards anarchy. A force of 10,000 loyalists would be enough to subdue Petrograd—the main source of disorder. . . . If Kerensky were to suggest a separate peace he would certainly have the great majority of the country with him. As to some of the prominent generals in Russia, Alexieff was a student of war and not suited to a crisis; Brusiloff was a politician, Kaledin, the commander of the 8th Army, was one of the best generals, and had been chosen by the Cossacks of the Don as their Chief. . . .

In concluding his statement, General Knox strongly urged on the War Cabinet the importance of a joint representation from the Allied Governments, recommending to the Russian Government that in view of Russia's desperate situation and the peril of putting back democracy, General Korniloff should be fully supported in the measures which he wished to take to restore discipline at the front, on the railways, and in Petrograd."

While these deliberations were going on, however, an open quarrel had broken out between Kerensky and Korniloff. The latter had been roused to anger by Kerensky's procrastination in



giving him powers, including the reimposition of the death penalty for disobeying orders, and had been persuaded to agree to an attempt to get himself proclaimed Military Dictator. Kerensky called upon him to resign, and Korniloff, assured of the support of the Commanders of all the Groups on the Western Frontier, raised the standard of revolt and appealed to the people in an order which ended thus:—

“I pledge you my word of honour as an officer and a soldier, and assure you once more that I, General Korniloff, the son of a simple Cossack peasant, have by my whole life, and not by words only, showed my unfailing devotion to my country and to freedom, that I am opposed to all counter-revolutionary schemes, and stand on guard over the liberties we have won, desiring only that the great Russian nation should continue independent.”

The rebellion of Korniloff failed. Had he been successful in establishing a military dictatorship it is more than doubtful, in view of the complete disintegration of the army, whether it would have been helpful to the Allies. The stubborn qualities of the Russian peasant soldier, which gave him that endurance which made him formidable even in defeat, had now been converted into a sulky and immutable resolve not to do any more fighting at anyone's bidding. Moreover, Korniloff's defiance of the Government was essentially an anti-Kerensky movement and for this reason the Allied Governments found themselves in an awkward position. The position was debated in the Cabinet on 12th September:—

“... It was felt that, difficult though it was for the British Government to interfere in the present situation without appearing to take sides with General Korniloff, it was essential, in the interests of the Allies and of democracy generally, to make an effort to improve the situation, although it was realised that any steps in that direction would have to be taken through M. Kerensky, as he was the representative of the existing Government. It was suggested that he should be informed that the British Government viewed with the greatest alarm the probabilities of civil war, and urged him to come to terms with General Korniloff not only in the interest of Russia herself, but in that of the Allies.”

Events, however, delivered us from the dilemma of choosing between Kerensky and Korniloff, for Korniloff was denounced as a traitor and arrested. But Kerensky himself says that though the Korniloff rebellion was crushed, it shook the authority of the Government, and weakened it sufficiently to give the Bolsheviks,

who had suffered a temporary check in the summer, their chance. "Without the Korniloff affairs," says Kerensky, "the crucifixion of Russian liberty on the Golgotha of Lenin's dictatorship would have been impossible." I cannot help thinking that he is taking too sanguine a view of the efficacy of his own leadership. Men of his temperament are doomed to failure in revolutionary times. They cannot reconcile idealism with action. Statesmen who hesitate in quiet times often gain thereby a reputation for moderation and sagacity. But in a tumult they are a national calamity.

It was clear that Russia as a fighting force was falling to pieces. Austrian prisoners were being allowed to escape and return to their own lines; Russian roads were blocked with deserters. We had news in October that 59 third line Russian divisions were being disbanded.

The situation was now rapidly getting worse. By November, anarchy prevailed in Petrograd and severe fighting was taking place in Moscow. News came that "Kerensky was endeavouring himself to command three weak divisions of Cossacks, in the vicinity of Tsarskoe Selo, which place had been occupied by the Bolsheviks." The telegram adds: "The behaviour of M. Kerensky appeared to be lamentable and to give little hope of any success on his part." Lenin and Trotsky, both resolute men, marched on Petrograd and on 7th November overthrew the Kerensky Government with the greatest ease. Kerensky put up no fight. The Bolsheviks were in power.\*

On 22nd November the War Cabinet discussed the question of their recognition:—

"... The difficulty was that any overt official step taken against the Bolsheviks might only strengthen their determination to make peace, and might be used to inflame anti-Allied feeling in Russia, and so defeat the very object we were aiming at. Nor was anything known of the actual position which would justify us, at this juncture, in backing either Kaledin or any other leader of the party of law and order."

On 26th November a telegram came from General Knox to say that, apart from anything the Russian authorities might do, the Russian troops at the front were now insisting upon an armistice.

"It appears quite clear," said Knox, "that whatever happens politically in Russia, the bulk of the Russian Army refuses to continue the War."

Co-operation between Russia and the rest of the Allies had gone by the board with the Bolshevik refusal to implement the London agreement of 1914. Trotsky demanded the release of Chicherin and Petroff, who were interned in England, and threatened reprisals

\* For Trotsky's statement of Bolshevik Policy, see Appendix to this Chapter.

against British subjects in Russia should these demands not be satisfied. A situation of the utmost complication was developing in our relations with Russia. Had the whole of Russia been under Bolshevik rule our course would have been clear. We should have treated with them as the *de facto* Russian Government. Had the Bolshevik leaders been the *de facto* Government, we could not have made war on them, or supported rebellion against their authority merely because they had made peace with Germany. But outside the towns—and they were not all Bolshevik—they had no authority. Vast portions of Russia were anti-Bolshevik, and Lenin's writ did not run over a third of the vast Empire built up by the Romanoffs. The peasants who constituted 80 per cent. of the population were hostile or unconcerned. It was a revolution of the industrial workers in an agricultural country. The Cossacks of the Don were opposed to them. The Ukraine wished a Government of its own. The Caucasus was by no means Bolshevik. Neither was Siberia. These were facts of great moment to us. The parts of Russia which were not yet Bolshevised were its granaries and its oilfields and it was vital to us that these resources should not fall into the hands of the Germans either through conquest or by arrangement with Lenin and Trotsky. The difficulties Mr. Balfour and I experienced in persuading certain members of the Government to have any dealings with Petrograd which would involve recognition of the Bolsheviks were considerably enhanced by Trotsky's revolutionary appeal to all nations to rise against the rule of the "*Bourgeoisie*." That term became the standing phrase for anyone who possessed private property of any sort or description. There was a genuine fear that recognition would involve admitting into Allied countries a swarm of Bolshevik intriguers to foment revolution. The Home Office drew our attention to an article in the *Woolwich Pioneer* by M. Litvinoff, given under his official seal, inviting the munition workers of Woolwich to start a revolution. The War Office reported that he had also been endeavouring to tamper with the discipline of British troops, notably Russian Canadians. These were some of the difficulties confronting us when we came to consider the problem of recognition.

The Cabinet considered the situation on 29th November. Trotsky had issued to the Military Attachés of Allied Powers, on 27th November, a note stating that he and his supporters were endeavouring to bring about a general and not a separate armistice, but that they might be driven to a separate armistice by the Allies if they refused to negotiate. If the Allied Governments would not recognise the Bolsheviks the latter would appeal to the peoples as against their Governments. Sir George Buchanan urged that a reply should be issued immediately to this "insolent communication," pointing out that Trotsky's proposal for a general armistice reached the



British Embassy nineteen hours after the Commander-in-Chief had opened *pourparlers* with the enemy, and that the Allies were determined to continue the War until a permanent peace had been obtained. Sir George Buchanan further urged the Government that, as the situation was now desperate, it was advisable to set Russia free from her agreement with the Allies, so that she could act as she chose, and decide to purchase peace on Germany's terms or fight on with the Allies. In his opinion the policy of the Bolsheviks was to divide Russia and Britain, and so pave the way for what would virtually be a German protectorate over the former. The course he recommended, if adopted, would make it impossible for the Bolsheviks to reproach the Allies with driving Russian soldiers to slaughter for their Imperialist aims. In the telegram sent to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff the Military Attaché at Jassy proposed that, if it were found that Kaledin, a great Cossack Chief, was well-disposed to the Allies, a French and a British Mission, fully accredited, should be sent to his headquarters; that financial support up to £10,000,000 should be guaranteed to Kaledin; and, generally, that the British Mission should have full power to act without awaiting instructions from England.

The War Cabinet were informed that a message from Trotsky, addressed to the Ambassadors of Norway, Holland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Denmark, had been stopped by the Press Bureau. It asked that pressure should be brought to bear by the Socialist and working-class organisations in these countries in favour of peace.

Some members of the War Cabinet were impressed with the objections to the policy of entering into active co-operation with Kaledin without further information. Steps had been taken to obtain such information, but it had not yet been received. Little was definitely known of Kaledin's personality, and there were signs that the Cossacks were not prepared to fight. The scheme, on General Ballard's admission, was not one which could be regarded as hopeful, and its only result might be to drive the Russian Government definitely into the arms of Germany.

Alternative courses open were to follow Sir George Buchanan's advice or to wait a little longer in the hope that the situation would subsequently become clearer. In any case, we could not act alone; the subject was one which should be referred to the conference now meeting in Paris.

But on the very day the Cabinet was discussing those communications Germany had accepted Lenin's offer of an armistice and Russian delegates crossed the German lines.

This Armistice altered fundamentally, to the detriment of the Allies, the whole military position in the West. Until it was signed the Germans and Austrians could not withdraw any substantial portion of their army from the Eastern Front. Some of their best

officers and men had been taken away to the West to fill up gaps in divisions depleted by the heavy fighting and inferior material had been sent to take their place on the Russian Front, but not many complete divisions had been withdrawn. There was still an element of doubt as to what the Russian Army might or might not do. It was known that the Kerensky Government was making great efforts to revive its fighting spirit and no one can forecast with certainty what direction a revolution may take. The Germans could not gamble on what would emerge out of chaos. Kerensky's efforts kept them guessing for months. That was a real service he rendered to the Allies. But as soon as he was swept out of power and his place taken by more resolute men, there could be no doubt that Russia meant to desert her Allies. France, Britain and Italy had to face a new and exceedingly dangerous situation. A power which had for three years absorbed millions of the best soldiers and thousands of the guns of the Central Powers had finally withdrawn from the fighting line. By the end of November the German strength on the Western Front had risen from 150 to 160 divisions. Other divisions were only waiting transport.

At the Inter-Allied Conference in Paris which began on 30th November, I communicated to the representatives of the other Allies the proposal which had been put forward by Sir George Buchanan, that in view of the conditions in Russia, the Allies:—

"should release Russia from the engagement entered into in the Pact of London not to make a separate peace, and that they should tell the Russian people that, realising the extent to which they are worn by war, and the effects of the disorganisation resulting from a great revolution, they would leave them to decide for themselves whether to obtain peace on Germany's terms, or fight on with their Allies who were determined not to lay down their arms until they had obtained guarantees for the world's peace."

After long discussions, in the course of which M. Clemenceau said that if Russia made a separate peace she would thereby betray us, and that, "if M. Maklakoff and all the celestial powers asked him to give Russia back her word, he would refuse," several draft messages were produced. In reference to Sir George Buchanan's suggestion of a joint declaration freeing Russia to make her own peace, I suggested that each nation should tell its own Ambassador to let it be known in Russia that we were ready to discuss war aims. It should be left to the discretion of each Ambassador to let this be known in the way which he considered best. I pointed out that in view of the Russian retirement there was some case for discussing war aims. Consider Russia's war aims, for example. She had aspired to the control of Constantinople, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. What was the use of talking of that now? Much less

was it possible to talk of the annexation of the Bukowina as a Russian war aim. It was, therefore, not for us to refuse reconsideration of our avowed war aims. At present the Russian war aims stood in the way of any separate peace with Turkey. It was decided that the representatives of the Great Powers who were signatories of the Treaty of London, dated the 4th September, 1914, and those who have since adhered to this treaty, should declare that they were ready to proceed to the examination of the war aims and of the possible conditions of a just and durable peace in concert with Russia, as soon as a regular Government, having the right to speak in the name of the nation, should be established in Russia.

We had now to consider what our attitude should be in regard to the new Russian Government, which at its very best, would in future be in the position of a neutral towards the Allies.

The problem with which the British Government and indeed the Allies as a whole were faced, was a purely military one. We were not concerned with the internal political troubles of Russia as such. What we had to consider as a war problem was how best to prevent Germany from revictualling herself afresh from the corn lands and the oilfields which would be laid open to her if she succeeded in penetrating to the Don and the rich provinces of the Caucasus. It was for this reason, and not from any anti-Communist motives, that we decided to give support to the loyalist Russians who were in control of these fertile areas, and who were not prepared to desert the others. If the Central Powers should succeed in obtaining possession of the vast stores of Russian wheat and oil, so essential to their continued prosecution of the War not only for themselves but also their allies, it would mean the prolongation of the struggle perhaps by years. We realised how vital a matter it was to Germany and Austria—in fact a matter indeed of life and death to their population—and we had a conviction that every effort must be put to cut off the enemy from those supplies. The War Cabinet therefore, discussed the need of organising the forces of resistance inside Russia. We examined the measures to be adopted to assist the anti-German formations which still existed in certain parts of Russia. The difficulty was to do so without appearing to wage war on the Bolshevik Government now established at Petrograd.

I had several discussions on the matter with the Foreign Secretary and we found ourselves in agreement as to the line to be taken. As there were members of the Government who were inclined to take up a strong anti-Bolshevik attitude, and Mr. Balfour was unable to attend the next meeting where our policy would be decided, I was anxious that his personal views should be communicated to his colleagues. I therefore asked him to embody the conclusions we had reached in a Memorandum for circulation to the Cabinet. It is one of Mr. Balfour's most notable State documents



## "NOTES ON THE PRESENT RUSSIAN SITUATION"

As I may not be able to be present at Cabinet to-morrow, I desire to make these notes.

The following points have to be specially kept in view:—

1. The safety of our Embassy in Petrograd and of British subjects in Russia.
2. The interests of Roumania and her Army.
3. The best course to adopt in order to diminish as much as possible the advantage which Germany will be able to extract from the dissolution of the Russian Army as a fighting force.

These subjects are all interconnected, though so far as possible I will deal with them separately.

(1) The greatest danger to Sir George Buchanan and the British colony arises probably out of the possibility of mob-violence, excited by the anti-British propaganda fomented by German money in Petrograd and elsewhere. The only real security against this is to be found either by the establishment of a strong and order-loving Government in Russia, or by the removal of the British, official and unofficial, to some safer country.

The first we can do nothing to secure. The second cannot be obtained unless we are able (a) to provide the necessary transport either through Sweden or through some northern port of Russia, and (b) to win the goodwill (in however qualified a form) of the present rulers of Petrograd.

The question of transport is hardly a Foreign Office matter, but the policy of avoiding the active malevolence of the Bolshevik Party raises most important diplomatic issues.

It was suggested at the Cabinet on Friday that after their recent proclamations, the Bolsheviks could only be regarded as avowed enemies, and to treat them as anything else showed a lamentable incapacity to see facts as they are, and to handle them with decision.

I entirely dissent from this view and believe it to be founded on a misconception. If, for the moment the Bolsheviks show peculiar virulence in dealing with the British Empire, it is probably because they think that the British Empire is the great obstacle to immediate peace; but they are fanatics to whom the constitution of every State, whether monarchical or republican, is equally odious. Their appeal is to every revolutionary force, economic, social, racial, or religious, which can be used to upset the existing political organisations of mankind. If they summon the Mohammedans of India to revolt, they are still more desirous of engineering a revolution in Germany. They are dangerous dreamers, whose power, be it great or small, transitory or

permanent, depends partly on German gold, partly on the determination of the Russian Army to fight no more; but who would genuinely like to put into practice the wild theories which have so long been germinating in the shadow of the Russian autocracy.

Now, contrary to the opinion of some of my colleagues, I am clearly of opinion that it is to our advantage to avoid, as long as possible, an open breach with this crazy system. If this be drifting, then I am a drifter by deliberate policy. On the broader reasons for my view, I will say a word directly, but its bearing on the narrower issue of the safety of Sir George Buchanan and the British colony is evident. I am personally of opinion that the Cabinet should reverse the decision it came to some little time ago and should deport to Russia the two interned Russian subjects\* in whose fate the Russian rulers appear to be so greatly interested. I was not in England when the decision to retain them was come to, and I am imperfectly acquainted with the reasons for it. Doubtless they were sufficient. But I certainly think that we may now with advantage send these two Russians back to their own country, where, judged by local standards, their opinions will probably appear sane and moderate.

I have already instructed Sir George Buchanan to abstain completely from any action which can be interpreted as an undue interference with the internal affairs of the country to which he is accredited, and I am unable to think of any other step which would help to secure his safety.

(2) As regards the Roumanian Army, events have marched rapidly. Everything that could be done, even as a forlorn hope has been done to enable the Army to join with other forces in Russia prepared to continue the struggle, but for the moment no such forces appear to exist, and the Roumanian Army is under the strictest military necessity of acquiescing in the Armistice, or rather the cessation of hostilities, on its part of the line. . . .

(3) I have already indicated my view that we ought, if possible not to come to an open breach with the Bolsheviks or drive them into the enemy's camp. But there are wider reasons for this policy than the safety of the British colony in Russia. These wider reasons are as follows:—

It is certain, I take it, that, for the remainder of this war, the Bolsheviks are going to fight neither Germany nor anyone else. But, if we can prevent their aiding Germany we do a great deal, and to this we should devote our efforts.

There are two possible advantages which Germany may extract from Russia's going out of the War: (i) She may increase her man-power in other theatres of operation by moving troops from Russian Fronts, or by getting back German prisoners. There is

\* Chicherin and Petroff.

little hope of stopping this, and I say no more about it. (ii) She may obtain the power of using the large potential resources of Russia to break the Allied Blockade. I am not sure that this is not the more important of the two advantages, and it has so far been very imperfectly examined. As regards oil, we want to know what means of transport there is in the Black Sea available to the Germans, and how far the anti-Bolshevik elements in the Caucasian regions can be utilised to interfere with the supply on land. As regards cereals, the difficulties the Germans are likely to have arise mainly, I suppose, from the chaotic condition of the country, the disorganisation of all means of transport, and the determination of the Russians to use their own produce for their own purposes.

If we drive Russia into the hands of Germany, we shall hasten the organisation of the country by German officials on German lines. Nothing could be more fatal, it seems to me, both to the immediate conduct of the War and to our post-War relations.

Russia, however incapable of fighting, is not easily overrun. Except with the active goodwill of the Russians themselves, German troops (even if there were German troops to spare) are not going to penetrate many hundreds of miles into that vast country. A mere Armistice between Russia and Germany may not for very many months promote in any important fashion the supply of German needs from Russian sources. It must be our business to make that period as long as possible by every means in our power, and no policy would be more fatal than to give the Russians a motive for welcoming into their midst German officials and German soldiers as friends and deliverers.

A. J. BALFOUR.

9th December, 1917."

I strongly supported the sagacious counsel given in this document. Mr. Balfour's views were not acceptable to several members of the Government, but ultimately the Cabinet decided that His Majesty's Government was not primarily concerned with the composition of the Russian Government or with the local aspirations of the Bolsheviks or other political parties, except in so far as they bore on their attitude to our conflict with the Central Powers. This was the line we had taken during the Czar's reign, and there was no reason to depart from it. Our dominant purpose throughout the evolution should be:—

(a) If possible, to keep Russia in the War until our joint war aims were realised; or

(b) If this could not be secured, then to ensure that Russia was as helpful to us and as harmful to the enemy as possible. For this



purpose we should seek to influence Russia to give to any terms of peace that might be concluded with the enemy a bias in our favour.

This attitude, if successful, would have averted the worst disasters of Russian defection. It was difficult to foretell how strong the Bolsheviks might become, or how long their power might endure; but if, as seemed likely, they maintained an ascendancy for the next few months only, these months were critical, and to antagonise them needlessly would be to throw them into the arms of Germany. There were at the moment signs that within a few days, when the elections of the Constituent Assembly had been completed, the Bolsheviks would be installed in power not only in a *de facto*, but also in a constitutional sense, for a considerable part but by no means for the whole of Russia.

In this connection messages had been received from the British Embassy at Petrograd. The terms were given of a six months' Armistice proposed by the Bolsheviks, and it was stated that there was a remarkable change in the official Press, the Allies not being attacked for the first time for several weeks.

In *The Times* of that day there appeared a report that the Germans were making the following conditions:—

- (a) Germany to obtain, for fifteen years, a control of the Russian wheat market;
- (b) Importation into Russia of all German goods duty free.
- (c) No territory now occupied by German troops to be surrendered.

Attention was also drawn to a telegram to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, dated the 5th December, 1917, recounting a private and unofficial interview with Krilenko, the Bolshevik Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army, during which he said that he had issued an order that all Armistice agreements should contain a clause forbidding transfer of troops from one front to another. He appeared most anxious to make a favourable impression on Allied officers and had carried out all suggestions made to him for safeguarding the lives of officers and their families. In a telegram dated the 6th December, 1917, Sir George Buchanan reported an interview between Captain Smith and Trotsky, at which the prohibition of British subjects leaving Russia was discussed in connection with the detention in this country of Messrs. Chicherin and Petroff. Trotsky denied that the prohibition was intended as a threat. His object had been to emphasise the difference between the treatment accorded to Russian subjects in the United Kingdom and British subjects in Russia. On publication in the local Press of a *communiqué* to the effect that the British Government would

reconsider the cases of all Russian subjects interned in Great Britain and would give facilities for return to their country of all Russians innocent of any offence punishable by the laws of Great Britain, he (Trotsky) would the same day restore full liberty of movement to all British subjects in Russia. Sir George Buchanan urged His Majesty's Government to agree to accept the compromise proposed by Trotsky, otherwise he feared that British subjects would be held up indefinitely.

The Cabinet accepted the Ambassador's advice and released the two Russians.

The making of peace between Russia and Germany was a somewhat protracted affair. Trotsky had on 22nd December, 1917, put forward terms for a general peace which were plausible. They were as follows:—

1. No forcible annexations of territory taken during the War.
  2. Complete restoration of independence to the nationalities who had lost it during the War.
  3. Nationalities not hitherto enjoying independence to have the right to decide by plebiscite whether they would be united to other States or acquire independence.
  4. Safeguarding of the rights of minorities in territories inhabited by several nationalities.
  5. No war indemnities, but war requisitions to be returned.
  6. Colonial acquisitions to be decided on the same principles.
- Economic war was condemned by the Russians.

Count Czernin, the Austrian Premier, in his reply to the Russian overtures on 25th December, delivered a speech which accepted the suggestion of a general peace and as far as phraseology was concerned seemed to concede all that we were fighting for. On closer examination of its terms its language was nebulous and ambiguous. None of our specific demands were conceded, although they appeared all to be covered. It was essential that we should ascertain what his utterance meant when we came to practical details. To enter into negotiations on the basis of vague formulæ embodied in a speech delivered by a statesman from a country that was not in a position to settle the issue of peace or war, would be to walk into an unknown territory in a mist. Germany had said nothing. We must therefore come to grips with the realities of the problem. We could only do that by stating in the frankest and clearest language what were our war aims. I came to the conclusion that the time had arrived when that should be done. The interpretation placed upon Czernin's vague expressions in subsequent speeches by German statesmen and the military chiefs and also the practical application given to them in the Brest-Litovsk Treaty amply justified our caution.

On the 21st we again discussed the situation. It was decided to

send Lord Milner and Lord Robert Cecil to Paris to confer with the French Government as to the attitude we should adopt in view of the Bolshevik peace overtures with Russia. After a full consideration by the Cabinet of the line they ought to take, they proposed the following Memorandum for submission to the French:—

“ At Petrograd we should at once get into relations with the Bolsheviks through unofficial agents, each country as seems best to it.

We propose to send Sir George Buchanan on leave for reasons of health, but we shall keep a Chargé d’Affaires there. We do not suggest that our Allies should follow our example. Sir George Buchanan’s long residence in Petrograd has indelibly associated him, in the minds of the Bolsheviks, with the policy of the Cadets, and he stands to them for much the same as, say, M. Miliukoff.

We should represent to the Bolsheviks that we have no desire to take part in any way in the internal politics of Russia, and that any idea that we favour a counter-revolution is a profound mistake. Such a policy might be attractive to the autocratic Governments of Germany and Austria, but not to the Western democracies or America. But we feel it necessary to keep in touch as far as we can with the Ukraine, the Cossacks, Finland, Siberia, the Caucasus, etc., because these various semi-autonomous provinces represent a very large proportion of the strength of Russia. In particular, we feel bound to befriend the Ukraine, since upon the Ukraine depends the feeding of the Roumanians, to whom we are bound by every obligation of honour.

As for the War, we should carefully refrain from any word or act condoning the treachery of the Russians in opening peace negotiations with our enemies. But we should continually repeat our readiness to accept the principles of self-determination, and, subject to that, of no annexation or indemnities. We should press on the Bolsheviks the importance of not being satisfied with empty phrases from the Germans, and point out that unless they get specific undertakings from them as to such questions as Poland, Bohemia, the Roumanian parts of Transylvania, not to speak of Alsace-Lorraine and the Trentino, they will get nothing. Meanwhile their powers of resistance are melting away, and they will soon be, if they are not now, at the mercy of the German Kaiser, who will then snap his fingers at all their fine phrases and impose on them any terms he pleases. They should be told that it is now probably too late to do anything to save the personnel of the Army. But the material of the artillery can still be preserved, and at the very least it should not be transferred to our enemies to be used against the Western democracies. Most important of all, the Bolsheviks should prevent, if they can, the wheat districts



of Russia, such as the Ukraine, falling into the control of or being made available for the Central Powers. This makes another reason why we are anxious to support and strengthen the Ukraine and why we urge on the Bolsheviks that, so far from trying to coerce the Ukrainians, they should enter into close co-operation with them.

In Southern Russia our principal object must be, if we can, to save Roumania. Next we must aim at preventing Russian supplies from reaching Germany.

Finally, we are bound to protect, if possible, the remnant of the Armenians, not only in order to safeguard the flank of our Mesopotamian forces in Persia and the Caucasus, but also because an Armenian, united, if possible, with a Georgian, autonomous, or independent State, is the only barrier against the development of a Turanian movement that will extend from Constantinople to China, and will provide Germany with a weapon of even greater danger to the peace of the world than the control of the Baghdad Railway.

If we could induce the Southern Russian armies to resume the fight, that it would be very desirable, but it is probably impossible. To secure these objects the first thing is money to reorganise the Ukraine, to pay the Cossacks and Caucasian forces, and to subsidise the Persians. The sums required are not, as things go, very enormous, but the exchange presents great difficulties. If the French could undertake the finance of the Ukraine, we might find the money for the others. It is understood that the United States will assist. Besides finance, it is important to have agents and officers to advise and support the provincial Governments and their armies. It is essential that this should be done as quietly as possible so as to avoid the imputation—as far as we can—that we are preparing to make war on the Bolsheviks.

We would suggest that the Ukraine should be again, in this matter, dealt with by the French, while we would take the other south-east provinces. A general officer from each country would be appointed to take charge of our respective activities, but they would, of course, keep in the closest touch with one another through carefully selected liaison officers in order to ensure the utmost unity of action.

It is for consideration whether we should facilitate the return to Southern Russia of the numerous Russian officers at present in France and England."

This Memorandum was accepted by M. Clemenceau and M. Pichon on 23rd December. Difficulties subsequently arose, however, between the Bolsheviks and the Germans, and the Brest-Litovsk negotiations were interrupted.

Our own attitude towards the Bolshevik Government at this time was not easy of definition. On 17th January, 1918, Mr. Balfour expressed to the War Cabinet the opinion that from a purely Foreign Office point of view there would be great advantages in cutting off all relations with the Bolsheviks. The latter had broken their treaty with the Allies, had repudiated their debts to us, and were openly trying to raise revolutions in all countries. The Italian Government were anxious that this course should be taken. On the other hand, we still had great interests in Northern Russia, and a number of British subjects there whose position had to be considered. It was, therefore, necessary that communications of a practical kind should take place through agents. He was quite clear that we could not give full recognition to the Bolsheviks until they could show that they were representative of the Russian people.

Mr. Balfour then read a reply given on the previous day in the House of Commons to questions put by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and others, which was as follows:—

“ . . . We have not recognised that Administration as being *de facto* or *de jure* the Government of the Russian people, but we carry on necessary business in an unofficial manner through an agent acting under the direction of our Embassy at Petrograd.

The Bolshevik Administration have appointed M. Litvinoff as their representative in London, and we are about to establish similar unofficial relations with him.

M. Nabokoff, who was the Chargé d’Affaires under the late Republican Russian Government, will presumably remain in London until he is either confirmed or superseded in his post by a Government recognised as representing the Russian people.

The present arrangement is obviously both irregular and transitory. Though it cannot be fitted into any customary diplomatic framework, it is, in our opinion, the best that can be devised to meet the necessities of the moment.”

Subsequently, on 22nd January, in setting forth his views on our Russian relations, he made a statement which showed that he, as well as the rest of us, was torn between conflicting considerations. He said that:—

“ In view of recent events in Petrograd, it was necessary for the War Cabinet to consider very seriously what our relations were to be with the Bolshevik Government. We were the only Allied nation that had admitted a Bolshevik representative; in fact, he gathered that we were the only nation to whom the Bolsheviks had appointed a representative. No formal recognition had been given, but the necessary business was transacted through an agent, namely, Mr. Leeper. The main difficulty was that the Bolsheviks

would not in the least mind quarrelling with us; they think that they have nothing to gain by keeping on good terms with England. It was a question, therefore, whether the Bolsheviks would commit some act which would provoke a rupture. He, personally, was inclined to the view that we should postpone a rupture as long as possible, as it was quite clear that the Bolsheviks provided the Germans with more difficulties than would be presented by the Social Revolutionaries. From the point of view of postponing a separate peace between Russia and Germany, and stopping the Germans getting supplies out of Russia, it would appear that the Bolsheviks were more likely to effect such a policy than any other party in Russia. The Bolsheviks, however, appeared determined to spread what he described as 'passionate propaganda' in this country, and also in Germany. He had been informed by Mr. Leeper that the Bolsheviks are convinced that social and political conditions in Germany are very bad, and that internal trouble is inevitable in the near future. This information is given them by one Radek, an international Jew of the same type as Trotsky, who is in close touch with the German Socialist Parties. Two views were current regarding Trotsky; one view was that he was in the pay of the Germans, and was playing the German game; the other view, which seemed the more probable, was that he was a genuine fanatic bent on spreading the doctrines of revolution throughout the world, but particularly in the two countries which he regarded as Imperialistic, viz. England and Germany."

Sir George Buchanan stated that he had always advocated a policy which would prevent an open breach with the Bolsheviks. On the other hand, it was clear that we should, sooner or later, have to choose between a rupture and complete reciprocity in everything. For instance, if we did not allow M. Litvinoff to send cypher telegrams, Trotsky would stop our representatives in Petrograd from sending cypher telegrams. Sir George said he would sooner see a rupture than allow Bolshevik propaganda on a large scale in this country, as such propaganda was dangerous, and attractive to those who had nothing to lose. He thought it was clear that the Germans would like to see a rupture between us and the Bolsheviks, and would like our representatives at Petrograd to be withdrawn, in order to give them a clear field. Any steps towards recognition by us would be exploited by the Bolsheviks in their own interests. Regarding the Social Revolutionaries, he thought that, although more correct in their methods, they were less of a nuisance to the Germans. The Social Revolutionaries had no backbone, and were, if anything, more anxious than the Bolsheviks to make a separate peace with Germany. Two things tended to cause him to modify his view that we should, if possible, avoid a rupture with the Bolsheviks, namely, the recent



maltreatment of the Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks, and secondly, the possibility of the Japanese or Americans, or both, giving effective military assistance to those elements in Southern Russia who were inclined to resist the Bolsheviks. In any event, he thought that the Bolsheviks would not ask us for assistance.

I sought the opinion of General Knox regarding the military situation in Russia, and the possibility of preventing the Germans from obtaining food and other supplies from Southern Russia. He thought that, even assuming a separate peace, it would be fully six months before the Germans could obtain anything important from Southern Russia. However, after six months they could obtain practically all their requirements, which would in effect break down the blockade. The only way to prevent this eventuality was the creation in Southern Russia of some effective force to resist German force. As regards the land, very little sowing had been done on landlords' property in South Russia, which meant that, unless the Germans could organise and get possession of this land before April, very little surplus corn would be available for export from Russia. The district of real importance was the Donetz coal basin, and whoever had effective possession of this was in a position to hold up the transport and resources of practically the whole of Russia, but the high prices which the Germans would offer would draw grain to enemy countries rather than to North Russia. A number of Russian officers had spoken to him in Petrograd with regard to the possibility of joining General Kaledin. As long, however, as we appeared to be giving any form of recognition or support to the Bolsheviks, it was not likely that they would take this step. Our dealings with the Bolsheviks undoubtedly decreased the effectiveness of the moral and material support we were giving to the Cossacks.

The information which we received from the Intelligence Department of the War Office was that it would appear that the Russian Armies were rapidly melting away. The Germans were advancing towards Pskoff, without meeting any form of resistance. Sixty per cent. of the Baltic Fleet had deserted, and even on the Roumanian Front the Russian troops were being evacuated at the rate of 12 full trains a day, leaving material and guns behind. As to the available resources in Southern Russia, a man who had been in the Ukraine as recently as last October had informed him that there were large quantities of cattle in that part of Russia.

Mr. Bruce Lockhart, our representative in Petrograd, kept us in touch with the situation, and on February 7th there was a discussion in the Cabinet as to our attitude towards the Bolsheviks.

Mr. Balfour adhered to the view he had already expressed in his Memorandum.

I expressed the opinion that it was no concern of the British Government what Socialist experiment or what form of government

the Bolsheviks were trying to establish in Russia. In regard to the particular question before us, it was necessary to bear in mind that the Bolsheviks were a formidable menace to Austria and Germany, and that our information regarding the internal conditions in Austria was such as to encourage the view that the internal political conditions of that Empire were seriously embarrassed by the spread of Bolshevism. I had no fear that Bolshevism was a formidable menace to the internal peace of this country. The recent by-election at Prestwich in Lancashire showed that, even in an industrial constituency, the vast majority of the nation were opposed to revolutionary ideas and in favour of carrying on the national war to a successful issue. I therefore thought that the grant of fuller authority to Mr. Lockhart might prove a useful opportunity for getting certain conditions agreed to by the Bolshevik Government in regard to their non-interference in the internal politics of Allied countries. I was also most anxious that the War Cabinet should not refuse the advice tendered to them by the British representatives in Russia, and I instanced several cases in the past where I thought errors had been made in refusing to accept such advice. The opinion I had formed of Mr. Lockhart was such as to cause me to hesitate before rejecting any advice he offered.

Some members of the Government viewed with considerable misgiving any dealings with the Bolshevik Government which would enhance its prestige and thus increase its propagandist influence.

The War Cabinet requested the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to prepare a draft reply to Mr. Lockhart's telegram, for their further consideration. Mr. Balfour's draft, as approved by the Cabinet and dispatched to Petrograd, was in the following terms:—

“ It would appear that there is some degree of misunderstanding in regard to our policy *vis-à-vis* the Petrograd Government. It is a mistake for you to suppose that we are ‘ disinclined to take the line of a qualified recognition of the Bolsheviks,’ and no less a mistake to fancy that our decision in this matter is influenced by ‘ anxiety as to the injury that might be inflicted on the Bourgeois elements in Russia by such a course.’ I must state clearly and emphatically in regard to this second point that we are in no way concerned with the internal affairs of Russia as such; our sole interest in them is how they affect the War. Should it be the case that extensive areas of the country at present favour the Bolshevik form of Socialism, that is the concern not of Britain but of Russia, and it does not seem to us to have anything to do with the issue of whether we recognise the Russian Government diplomatically.

My opinion in regard to this matter is that there is no material difference, as regards the form of recognition to be accorded, between the view you have cabled and that which His Majesty's

Government holds. We both agree that at the moment it is impossible to accord full and complete recognition, and most undesirable to make a complete rupture. The precise nature of the intermediate course to be adopted is the only problem. Provided it is understood that our diplomatic relations are no more than informal and semi-official, there appears to be no reason why you should not function as the British Embassy's acknowledged representative. With the *de facto* Bolshevik Government at Petrograd we are prepared to enter into relations in just the same way as we have done with the *de facto* Governments of the Ukraine, Finland and elsewhere.

But greater difficulties arise as regards the lines on which you should conduct your conversation with M. Trotsky. Naturally we do not want at the present time to spend time discussing past grievances such as the broken treaties, the debts repudiated, the military stores abandoned, the outbreak of war with Roumania, etc., but dealing merely with the present and the future, we note certain basic issues in regard to which we cannot meet the wishes of the Bolsheviks nor they ours. We desire that they should refrain from Bolshevik propaganda in the territories of the Allies. And they wish us to refuse aid or encouragement to any military or political movement in Russia of which they disapprove. The former demand would involve the abandonment by the Bolsheviks of their loudly advertised principles, while the latter would compel us to leave in the lurch our Allies and friends in those parts of Russia where the *de facto* government is not Bolshevik.

Apart from these, however, there are numerous important matters in regard to which there would be valuable scope for judicious diplomacy. For the moment the first of these is to persuade the Petrograd Government against making a separate peace with Germany, and to get them to cease their hostility to Roumania. Direct efforts to stop peace with Germany would very likely defeat the end in view, but it would help matters to point out that the Germans will be more stubborn on questions of the freedom of Esthonia and Lithuania while they are without anxiety about the Roumanian border. It is our earnest wish to postpone as long as we can a break with the Petrograd Government—even if in the end a break cannot be avoided—and to make our semi-official dealings with them in the meantime pleasant and businesslike. So we agree to your suggestion that from now on you shall have the status of a recognised intermediary acting for us. We lay down no conditions for authorising this, because we shall reach a hopeless *impasse* the moment we start discussing conditions. As far as we can, we shall check Bolshevik propaganda in this country; and if agents of the



Bolsheviks are guilty of outrageous conduct we shall deport them, in the same way as we should treat representatives of any other Government that started interfering with our internal affairs. Trotsky will no doubt adopt the same attitude; but if he wants us to terminate our relations with the Cossacks and the Caucasus, he will first have to prove that the *de facto* Government in those regions is Bolshevik.

I am certain, in the last place, that there is one matter on which we agree, whatever our differences. Both the Bolsheviks and ourselves want to bring about the end of militarism in Central Europe. That being so, there will doubtless be questions of policy on which it will be possible for us to co-operate, and on which invaluable aid can be diplomatically rendered by you. For example, Trotsky might refuse Germany any supplies that would help her to prolong the War, or strengthen the efforts of the militarists to suppress any movements for a democratic peace on the part of the people at large.

We will for our part wait for suggestions from him as to what is the best we can do in such circumstances to help, with necessary supplies and in other directions."

But after many vicissitudes, peace was signed between Russia and Germany on 3rd March, 1918. A treaty had already been signed between the Central Powers and the Ukraine on 9th February. Roumania, pitifully situated, had no other alternative but to make peace, which she did on 27th February.

On 12th March, however, President Wilson thought fit to send a message expressing sympathy with the people of Russia on the occasion of the opening of the Congress of Soviets at Moscow.

It was pointed out (in the Cabinet) that this document did on behalf of the United States exactly what Mr. Lockhart had urged the British Government to do. The American public, however, had not the same cause for resentment against Russia as the European Allies, who had made great investments in Russia, and who had been deserted in the midst of the struggle.

But when the full text of the Peace Terms became known to us, the attitude of the Allies took a more definite and homogeneous form, and the question of this final betrayal by Russia of her Allies was the subject of a political conference of the Allies in London on 16th March. It was decided to issue a declaration expressing their indignation and M. Clemenceau prepared and read to the conference a draft. After substituting the word "Entente" for "Supreme War Council"—since it was pointed out, much to M. Clemenceau's disgust, that President Wilson objected to intervention by the Supreme War Council in political matters—the draft was substantially adopted.

On 18th March, the statement, drafted by the most mordant pen in Europe, was issued on behalf of the Allies, protesting against the Russo-German Treaty. It did not lack vigour. It ended by a repudiation of the Treaty itself.

"... Peace treaties such as these we do not, and cannot acknowledge. Our own ends are very different; we are fighting, and mean to continue fighting, in order to finish once for all with this policy of plunder, and to establish in its place the peaceful reign of organised justice.

As the incidents of this long War unroll themselves before our eyes, more and more clearly do we perceive that the battles for freedom are everywhere interdependent; that no separate enumeration of them is needed; that in every case the single but all-sufficient appeal is to justice and right.

Are justice and right going to win? In so far as the issue depends on battles yet to come, the nations whose fate is in the balance may surely put their trust in armies which, even under conditions more difficult than the present, showed themselves more than equal to the great cause entrusted to their valour."

## APPENDIX

### TROTSKY'S STATEMENT OF BOLSHEVIK POLICY

THE power of the Soviet is the power of the workers and peasants and soldiers; and remember that the soldiers are simply the self-same workers and peasants. This is the first really large-scale trial of Government by the labouring masses. Till now the Government of a country was simply an instrument of power wielded by a small section which possessed everything over a large part which possessed nothing. Our plan is to form a Government based on the power of the larger mass of the people, which larger mass is now freeing itself from the oppression of the small mass. Government by the small mass has so far generally caused poverty and misery to the larger mass. The Soviet is the main organ of this new power in the centre and provinces of Russia.

Our programme is dictated by the interests of workers and peasants. Peace is essential to them. The power of our Soviet is an instrument for fighting for peace. In this fight for peace we are not reckoning on the goodwill of the bourgeois and its diplomacy, but on the pressure of the people. No official or semi-official patriotic lie can screen the fact that the labouring masses in all the warring countries are revolutionised to the very depths by this disgraceful slaughter, which does no more than show up the criminal character of capitalistic rule. The masses in all the countries hate the War and those who caused the War.

Revolution broke out first in Russia only for the reason that the machinery of Government was weaker in Russia than in other countries. But the War has in all countries caused an accumulation of revolutionary yearnings in the very depths of mankind, and revolution will break out earlier than is expected by the ruling parties of Europe. The plan of our universal policy is to give a push to the revolution in the centre and on the west of Europe. This is the real road to a democratic peace.

What about Belgium? Alsace-Lorraine? We did not at the commencement of the War believe, and we do not believe now, that the War is carried on by the ruling class for the sake of guarding the rights of weak nations. No! The bourgeois of all countries are fighting for property. If it could be imagined that the War will pass without punishment to the ruling classes, and that imperialism will remain the guiding hand in politics of so-called civilised people,



it would be naïve to think of the defending of weak and backward nations. Imperialism took everything and made slaves of everybody. Only the undefeated revolution of the working classes against imperialism can free Belgium, Alsace-Lorraine, and all weaker countries.

We are convinced that the German peoples who are now shedding their own blood, will not allow the German ruling-class officers to attack revolutionary Russia. We are sure there will be a temporary peace on all fronts. But if (though we find it impossible to imagine this) against our straight and open proposition of immediate democratic peace, the German people remain passive and the German Kaiser moves his armies against us, our Army will defend itself to the last drop of blood, because it is not now a question of an imperialistic war, but it is the question of guarding the revolution, which offers peace to everybody.

We have given over the land of Russia from the landowner to the peasant, and the peasant will not pay anything for it.

We are placing a workers' control over production, with the object of gradually changing over the basis of production from capitalistic on to socialistic lines.

We are nationalising all banks, with the object of making one national bank. In these matters we shall act fearlessly and without pity, overcoming the resistance of landowners and capitalists who do not wish to give up their privileges without a fight.

Our plans are colossal, difficult, grandiose, but the strength of the people, opened up by the revolution, will overcome all difficulties and fulfil its ideals.

L. TROTSKY,  
Smolny Institute.

3rd November, 1917.

## CHAPTER LXXII

### THE PROBLEM OF MAN-POWER

#### 1. THE OUTLOOK FOR 1918.

At the beginning of the War there were in round figures about nine million men of military age (between 19 and 50) in Great Britain, and roundly a further million reached military age in the course of the War. Meantime, of course, several hundred thousand passed beyond the military age limit; but altogether there were about ten million men who at one time or another during the War were of military age. Of these ten million, it may be estimated that approximately six million were fit for general service.

Before conscription came into force, at the end of May, 1916, there were serving with our naval and military forces, apart from those of the Dominions and India, just over four million of these men. Between then and the end of the war a further two million men joined the armed forces of the country. This included men who had already attested before conscription was enforced but had not been called up, and it also included some who were not qualified for the "A" category and were used for service behind the lines. It is worth noting that fully two out of three of the men who joined our forces from the population of this island during the Great War, to fight for their country, were volunteers, not conscripts. Altogether, upwards of six million men from Great Britain served at one time or other with the forces of the Crown in the Great War, a total roughly corresponding with the number of fit men of military age in the Kingdom. While there were some fit men retained throughout the period of the War in civilian occupations, because they were judged to be of greater value to the nation's war effort there than they would have been in the Army or Navy, numbers of men not fit for general service were drawn into the forces for auxiliary work, thus redressing the balance.

These figures show that in the course of the War the nation put forth its full strength, and made the most thorough use of its available man-power. Nearly every fit man of military age served with our Forces, while the remainder of the male population, and a large part of the female population, undertook some form of work designed to aid the war effort.

When the Man-power Committee of the Cabinet made its investigation of our remaining man-power resources in December, 1917, this process had been very nearly carried out to the full during 1917 under the auspices of the special department instituted for that purpose, and the margin which they then found available for further exploitation was meagre in the extreme. They prefaced their report with the statement that the drain on the robust manhood of the country which it had been foreseen that the War would impose was now no longer prospective but actual. We were not the only belligerent country that found itself in that predicament. All had used up their man-power to the last limit of exhaustion. I maintain that we made a more prudent distribution of our resources than any of our partners or foes. We acted on the assumption that staying power was what mattered most. Had we not taken that view the Allies would have collapsed before America had time to come to the rescue.

Viewed through the eyes of military historians and controversialists the problem of man-power seems to have been a very simple one. Here were so many millions of young men in Britain fit for soldiering. There were too many to send simultaneously to the War, but all who were at first left behind would be reserved for the inevitable wastage. Our behind-the-line warriors could not understand the parsimony with which a niggardly and unsympathetic civilian Government doled out recruits when there was still a remnant of unspent manhood left at home to pursue their ordinary avocations. Their minds were bogged in the ideas and traditions of a bygone age when war conditions were so essentially different from those of this mechanical era. There was a time in the past when a nation's total wartime man-power was reckoned by counting all men of any age who could carry a spear or wield a sword and endure the hardships of a campaign. Most of the arms and munitions used in battle were carried by the men who employed them. A few carts would bring along all the reserve of javelins that were needed. Much of the siege artillery was improvised from material available in the forests and the army lived on the country through which it passed. The latest examples of such an army were the Boer Commandoes in the South African War. The farmer took up his rifle, filled and put on his bandolier, packed his saddle bag with biltong, had a few Cape carts for a reserve of cartridges and food, and thus equipped he and his followers became an army that held up the British Empire for over two years. In ancient wars the requirements of the population at home were very simple. Old men, with the help of women and children, could plough the land, harvest the crops and mind the cattle. At sea one has only to compare the requirements of the fleet of small wooden ships that fought the Armada with our monster steel ships and the thousands of craft, great and small, that guarded



our communications. Even in 1918 there were responsible military leaders whose ideas about man-power were unconsciously governed by this primitive conception of warfare.

But to any Government responsible to the nation for the successful prosecution of a protracted and exhausting war under modern conditions, the problem of how to make the best disposition of our national man-power was much more complex. We had not only to provide and keep supplied the immense equipment of modern armies and navies, but to administer and conserve our highly developed national life and activities at home. We were responsible for maintaining the whole war effort of the nation, military, naval, commercial, industrial, financial, diplomatic, and to a large extent for sustaining the effort of our Allies. To carry out that wide range of tasks, our dwindling man-power had to be husbanded and carefully allotted among these conflicting claims. All had to go short of the supply they desired, and to carry on as well as they could with such resources as could be spared to them. Every nation was profligate of its man-power in the early stages of the war and conducted its war activities as if there were no limit to the number of young men of military age who were fit to be thrown into the furnace to feed the flames of war. The Allies, who had an enormous superiority in the number of fit young men available, nearly threw away their advantage by the reckless prodigality of their military leaders. The German tactics had a more constant regard than the Allied military methods to the importance of winning without wasting valuable lives. Had they emulated Allied heedlessness in this respect they would have been broken by sheer exhaustion before the end of 1916. The British and French casualties on the Western Front were twice as heavy as the German losses. Russia lost three times as heavily as did her German assailants. The idea of a war of attrition was the refuge of stupidity and it was stupidly operated, with the consequence that the overwhelming superiority in man-power which the Allies enjoyed at the beginning of the War had by the fourth year been melted down to the dimensions of a dubious equality. For this reason, had America not come in at the last moment of exhaustion, the event of the War would have been different. We might not have been beaten, but we should have had to accept a deadlock solution.

The British man-power problem differed in some essential respects from that of our Allies. In a special measure we had to carry the burden of maintaining, not ourselves alone, but our Allies as well. The command of the seas, without which Allied victory would have been impossible, was preponderatingly our charge, and our Navy had the supreme task of keeping the seas clear, hunting down the German submarines, holding the enemy warships pinned to their harbours, and convoying the merchant shipping which bore supplies not only

for ourselves but for our Allies. The French and Italian Fleets made their contribution to this work, but compared with ours it was insignificant, and involved no serious drain on the man-power of those two countries. Men were needed not only for the manning of our immense Navy and Mercantile Marine, but for the building of new ships and swarms of new craft to patrol the sea, and to keep these constantly repaired and refitted. There was a difference equivalent to several army corps between the numbers absorbed by the manning and equipment of our naval and mercantile marine and those employed by France, Italy, Russia or Germany in the same tasks. The occupation of the corn-growing and cattle-rearing plains of Northern France by the Germans deprived Frenchmen of a large proportion of their wheat and meat resources. Without our ships, neither Italy nor France could have carried on for a single year. They would have been starved into surrender. Nor could we have conveyed our troops and theirs—including American troops—to the various theatres of war and maintained them there. But the manning of our naval and mercantile fleets, the provision of men for their docks, their building and repairing yards, their arming and munitioning, for the maintenance of minelayers and minesweepers and of the endless contrivances invented to fight the deadly submarine—all these demands in the aggregate absorbed well over a million of our man-power. If the men of military age and fitness amongst these were counted, it would be the equivalent of at least 30 divisions. There is no greater proof of the exclusiveness of a profession than the fact that great soldiers of exceptional intelligence like General Foch could never understand how essential sea-power was to the very existence of the alliance. Nelson taught Napoleon his first lesson in the importance of sea-power at the Battle of Aboukir. The isolation of Napoleon's Army from its sources of reinforcement and supply brought home to him the sinister possibilities which lurked in the sea for the schemes of a captain of land forces. And in the years which followed he was given many more warnings of the difficulty of overcoming a foe that ruled the waves. But it was never impressed on the mind of Foch by any drawback or deficiency. He never understood that the unlimited ammunition with which his armies were supplied and the fact that not only his men but their families were well fed were attributable to the might of the British Navy and the enterprise of our great Mercantile Marine. He thought the allocation to the sea services of so many fit men who could have been sent to the Army was sheer waste, and the traditional obsession of a great sea power. He once flew into a temper over this criminal lavishness of good men on ships and Clemenceau had to pull him up. He always asked: "What have the Navy done? Have they done any fighting?" Our own generals, too, in their various memoranda, almost completely ignored the call of the sea on our manhood. And

yet they would have had no armies on any battlefield, had it not been for the complete command of the sea which our sailors and their auxiliary helpers on shore succeeded in maintaining, and the British people would have been driven to make peace in order to avert famine.

But sea power and shipping services were by no means the only rival claimants with the Army for men. Our coal mines needed them. We had not only to supply fuel for our forges, rolling mills, arsenals and munition works, but also to supply France, whose best coal mines were in German hands, and Italy, who had no coal of her own. As it was we could supply Italy with only a meagre proportion of her needs; and not only were her population suffering severely from lack of fuel, but her war effort was being crippled through lack of coal for her workshops. Our munition workers were straining to keep pace with the fabulous demands of the Army for munitions of every kind, traditional and new. These demands increased from battle to battle. During the first six months of the War the total expenditure of artillery ammunition was approximately one million rounds, including only a very trivial amount of heavy shell. In September, 1918, we were expending nearly a million rounds in a single day, including over 160,000 rounds of heavy and very heavy shell (six-inch to 15-inch). The factories in this country were also turning out considerable quantities of armaments of various kinds for our Allies. We provided a good deal of equipment for the American forces, including heavy artillery and ammunition.

The vital part played by the exploitation of British soil during the last two years of the War to aid in feeding the nation has been described elsewhere by me.\* But for that achievement, Britain would have suffered the fate which ultimately overtook Germany and her allies, of being starved first into discontent and then into surrender. As it was, our home-grown food supplies not only enabled us to divert cargoes of imported wheat to France and Italy, but to take the grave risk with our food which was involved in turning the shipping engaged on its transport to the task of bringing over the American troops. All this meant the retention of more men on the land.

Throughout the War we had to maintain our financial position for the benefit of ourselves and our Allies; and this meant keeping up a certain measure of industry to provide goods to sell abroad in exchange for the supplies we were purchasing. Indeed, when the American Mission, headed by Colonel House, met us in London in November, 1917, one of its members, Mr. Colby, Assistant Secretary to the United States Treasury, expressed regret that we had gone as far as we had in scrapping our export industries to use our manpower for our military effort. He declared that for many reasons the

\* Chap. XLIV.



United States Government, especially the Treasury, would have preferred that these trades, for economic and financial reasons, had not been killed.

For all these vitally important tasks, as indispensable to our war effort as service in the trenches, men were needed, and the Government had to take care that at least a minimum supply of labour was reserved for each. I have previously described how, as the War progressed, legislation was adopted and administrative measures were taken for the purpose of rallying the whole available man-power of the nation and distributing it as economically as possible where it was required.\* In course of time the reservoir of population engaged in ordinary civil avocations, which could be drawn on to supply additional man-power for one or other of the various tasks essential to our national effort, dwindled and shrank until it was practically dry. The whole manhood of the country had been surveyed and directed, either into the defence forces of the realm, or into work of vital national importance for supplying our Army and Navy, feeding the nation and our Allies, maintaining what were recognised as essential trades and industries, public utilities and administration. Some of our indispensable services had at one stage been allowed to become so depleted of workers that it was found necessary to bring back men to them out of the trenches.

In this process of organisation of our man-power the ranks of men within the military age limits had been combed and recombined with meticulous care. Every one of them who could be regarded as fit for military service (and the standard grew progressively lower and more elastic as this destructive war went on) was promptly claimed for the Army unless compelling reasons were forthcoming to warrant his retention in civil life—that is to say, that his services to the national effort would be more valuable there than in the Army. If he was not indispensable, or if a substitute could be found for him among men not of military age and fitness, he was put into khaki. The military tribunals were constantly busy all over the country, and the military representatives upon them were always calling insistently for the enlistment of each man brought before them. Every able-bodied man was fought for. No doubt a number passed through the net who ought to have been caught; but the Government could not override the decisions of tribunals set up by Parliament.

Complete national service, in the sense of conscripting the whole population and requiring every citizen, whatever his age or condition, to place himself under orders and take up such work as was prescribed for him by officials, was never finally enforced. Even Germany

\* Chap. IX: Ministry of Munitions. 3, The Problem of Labour; Chap. XXIII: The Coming of Conscription; Chap. XLV: A System of National Service; Chap. LIX: Problems of Labour Unrest.

shrank from that drastic expedient, in spite of constant pressure from powerful military leaders. Nevertheless, as the War progressed, social pressure and the economic measures taken by the Government combined to bring about a state of affairs more and more nearly approximating to what could have been ordained under such a system. But so far as men of military age were concerned, the working of the Conscription Acts brought it about that every one of them was marked down, registered, and either taken into the Army or allocated to some job where his service would be of still greater value to the national effort. Doubtless there were some shirkers, or "skrimshankers" and "khaki dodgers," as they were contemptuously designated, who managed to evade the Army when they should rightly have been in it. But they were not a high percentage; had all such been ruthlessly picked out, the total reinforcement they would have provided would have been trivial in numbers and poor in fighting quality. Before the end of 1917 it might safely be asserted that there was no source of potential recruits left uncombed, no reservoir of man-power undrained. Apart from the annual increment of youths reaching military age, the only way to secure further reinforcements for the Army was to divert to it men already serving the country in other ways, in munition works, coal mines, shipyards, transport, food production, public utilities, essential trades and industries, where their services had hitherto been judged indispensable.

Whether any considerable body of these men should be thus diverted to the Army was a problem for statesmanship. It could not just be settled by the requisitions of the Army authorities. The Generals could not be expected to judge the issue dispassionately. Their reckless wastage of the man-power so lavishly placed at their disposal also vitiated their judgment. Apart from that consideration, they were not responsible for ensuring the maintenance of our naval services, our shipping, our dockyards, our railways, our agriculture, our arrangements for feeding and clothing the nation, nor even our munition supply. Neither were they concerned with the preservation of national unity by avoiding the irritation and exasperation which threatened to impair the national spirit. They were solely concerned with military operations. They desired bigger and bigger armies with an insistent and almost querulous appetite. In the constant demands made upon the Government for more and more men to fill up gaps and equip the new services in the Army, there was no indication that our great Generals realised that there could be any other demands for man-power entitled to recognition. They were not to be persuaded that we could not carry on these essential non-military services entirely with the rejects of medical examiners. Every fit person diverted from their armies to any other purpose represented a betrayal of trust by pusillanimous and undiscerning

politicians. Were there not hundreds of thousands of men in Britain still allowed to skulk at home? If sent to Flanders, they would pave the highway to a glorious triumph! It was a war of attrition; as Sir William Robertson had written: "We should follow the principle of the gambler who has the heaviest purse and force our adversary's hand and make him go on spending until he is a pauper."

The Official History of the Military Operations in France and Flanders laments that the reinforcements called for by the Generals were not always provided in full and promptly. Yet we sent more men to reinforce our armies on the Western Front in 1917 than we had promised to provide, because the casualties exceeded the worst anticipations. Our military critics would have been in a better position to complain, had they given the Government the aid of their influence in stopping the criminal wastage of so many hundreds of thousands of our picked young men on enterprises which they must have known had no chance of success. Had they done so, the German success in the spring offensive of 1918 would have been anticipated and averted. Further, it must be remembered that the big reinforcements originally demanded by Sir Douglas Haig in the late autumn of 1917 were not just to defend his line until the arrival of the American Army should make a great offensive all along the front a feasible operation, but in order that he himself should be able to continue in the spring his Passchendaele attack, and thus throw away another 200,000 or 300,000 men before our Allies were ready to co-operate. To these plans the French Generals and many of our own were opposed, and we had no intention of disorganising our national arrangements in order to provide them. On the other hand, it seemed clear from the figures available to us—including those furnished by Sir Douglas Haig himself—that the forces at his disposal, with such reinforcements as we could supply, were adequate to repel any attack provided the defences were put in good order, the troops wisely distributed along the line in suitable proportions, and the reserves properly adjusted in readiness to support any threatened sector.

Nor was the problem purely material. The morale of the home front was fully as vital to success as the defence of the line in France. Ruthless expedients for reinforcing the Army which precipitated civil disturbances, strikes and possibly revolution in Britain would have been a poor way of seeking victory. Some of the emergency measures which in the crisis of the spring of 1918 were taken to reinforce our hard-pressed Army were not only measures so detrimental to the nation's war activities in other vital directions that nothing less than such a crisis would have justified them on material grounds; they were measures which only that crisis rendered psychologically possible. Had any attempt been made to enforce them previously, it would have provoked civil disturbance and domestic collapse. As it



was, they produced a violent national protest in Ireland and we got no recruits there.

It is with these considerations in mind that the man-power demands of the Army at the end of 1917, and the Government's attitude to those demands must be studied.

One of the greatest difficulties experienced by the Government in allocating man-power was attributable to the constantly shifting figures of War Office requirements. An official who had been working at what was for him a purely statistical problem at the War Office once informed me that it was the most hopeless task he had ever undertaken. No one seemed to understand the simplest principles of arithmetic. It was not that they could not add or subtract, but he could not find anyone who was certain what ought to be added and what subtracted. Categories shifted about from day to day. The result depended on the view taken at the time by the individual officer who performed the operation or his superior. That view was a changeable one and according to the exigencies of opinion the figures fluctuated. Amidst all the shuffling and transmutations no one could answer with certainty a simple question as to the numbers of our fighting men. One distinguished General who had been deputed to investigate the actual position told me that when he started his inquiry he found 40,000 men had vanished altogether; and although they were on the pay-roll no one could explain where they were. I can understand the unreliability of guesses made at enemy casualties. These are always exaggerated on both sides. One estimate given to me, of 1,000,000 Germans killed and wounded on the Somme opposite the British line alone and of almost a similar number put *hors de combat* in the Battle of Flanders, did seem particularly wild guess. When, however, you come to add up the numbers on the pay-roll of your own army, it seems to be a simple sum for unbiased mathematicians. But the fact remains that military staff figures had no relation to actual conditions or facts; they varied according to the case which the High Command had to make for the time being. When G.H.Q. were bent upon either launching a new offensive or continuing or renewing an old one, then the men at their disposal indicated an overwhelming superiority over those which the enemy could put into the fighting line.

In the discussions of the War Committee of the Cabinet in June, 1917, when the Passchendaele offensive was under consideration, Sir William Robertson said that as regards man-power, he anticipated no difficulty. He hoped to have 150,000 men to send out, with which to supply the 20,000 or 30,000 wanted to complete the establishment of the Army in France and replace the casualties suffered in the attack. He would also send out the 67th Division.

The drafts sent out to the Army in France in the summer of 1917 were in fact in excess of the amounts promised. According to a

War Office letter to Sir Douglas Haig of February 15th, 1917, and subsequent letters, he was promised 356,000 men between March 1st and October 31st, 1917. The number actually sent was 376,000—an excess of 20,000.

The German strength on the Western Front in 1917 was considerably below that of the Franco-British forces, and in pleading for his Flanders offensive in June, Haig insisted that much of it was of inferior quality.

On 8th October, in response to a request from me, Haig wrote to the C.I.G.S. giving his appreciation of what rôle the British Armies should adopt if Russia were forced out of the War. He then declared that our forces were in good fettle, that the Germans were badly broken, that their reserves of man-power would be exhausted by May or June, 1918, and that by 1st April, 1918, the Allies would outnumber the Germans in actual numbers by 30 per cent. even after allowing for the number of divisions which the Germans might be able to bring across from their Eastern Front.

It is true that this estimate was based on the assumption that the gaps in the British Army would be filled by reinforcements from home; but the total deficiency reported to the Government only amounted to 75,000 men—a number well within our capacity to supply—and even if it were not filled, our superiority according to Haig's October estimate would still be well over 20 per cent. These were the figures submitted to us when it was necessary to exaggerate our strength in order to justify a costly offensive.

But when the policy changed, and it was decided to postpone offensives until the American troops arrived, and Haig was invited meanwhile to take over more line, then the alleged superiority disappeared and was transformed into an alarming deficiency. During the whole time the Cabinet Committee was investigating the question of man-power, the figures supplied through the War Office were being constantly altered, and the Cabinet were quite unable to get any stable and reliable estimates as to the actual position.

The estimates supplied in the War Office letter of 3rd November, 1917, showed that by 31st October, 1918, allowing for men recovering in France from wounds and returning to the forces, there would be a net infantry deficit of 259,000 men, most of which would be offset by a considerable increase in the numbers of men attached to mechanised arms at the disposal of our Army.

A fresh estimate, contained in a Memorandum by the C.I.G.S. dated 19th November, 1917, stated that the Army was then nearly 100,000 men below strength. There was no clear indication of the basis of this estimate, which appeared to make no allowance for the increase in arms other than infantry. "To provide for the normal winter wastage, and bring the Armies up to strength by April, 1918, we require 500,000 men," it continued. "Towards this we have now

n sight 225,000 men. By the end of October next it is calculated that, if no further measures are sanctioned, the Armies will be 300,000 men below strength."

Five days later, another and yet more gloomy estimate was furnished in a letter from Sir Douglas Haig. Writing on 24th November, 1917, to the War Office, he declared that "it is evident from calculations based on previous experiences that the British Infantry in France will be approximately 250,000 or about 40 per cent. below establishment on the 31st March next."

According to another G.H.Q. calculation made at about this time, quoted in the Official History,\* the shortage by 31st October in the Infantry on the Western Front would be 460,000. All these changing figures proved to be purely fanciful. They were not estimates carefully prepared by officials who understood the elements of accountancy but merely a succession of grouses from Generals who had failed to achieve what they had hoped for and had promised and were anxious to put the blame for their discomfiture on the politicians who had dared to predict the failure.

The figures supplied by the Adjutant-General in the latter part of December to the Cabinet Committee on Man-power provide yet a further variant of the rate of wastage and the need for reinforcements. It is suggested by these figures that up to 31st March, the wastage of troops in France will amount to 260,100 men—equivalent to 86,700 men a month. These figures were a ludicrous exaggeration, and it is difficult not to regard them as a deliberate miscalculation.† These were the computed losses involved in holding the trenches during the winter. They obviously do not include estimated losses during some great battle. Pétain estimated his losses for the same period for a longer line at 40,000 a month. The total estimate of the number of men needed for the Army up to the end of September, 1918, was put at 1,304,000; and after reckoning the men already in khaki who could be drafted out from the forces in Britain, and recovered wounded and sick, it was stated that 600,000 new recruits would be needed.

On reviewing all these different estimates, it can be noted, first, that they each contradict the other, and secondly, that they become progressively more alarmist and rapacious.

Another curious feature in the calculations of our military strength by the War Office was the way they concentrated on rifle strength, and ignored the man-power allocated to other combatant services. As the War went on the mechanical power at the disposal of the Armies increased rapidly. In artillery, machine-guns, aviation, tanks and transport, machinery was playing a more and more important

\* "Military Operations in France and Belgium, 1918," Vol. I, p. 27.

† The total casualties actually incurred in France between 1st January and 31st March, 1918, were 196,567. These included the heavy losses of the Battle of St. Quentin.



part in the struggle and was consequently absorbing more and more men. The mechanical superiority of the Allies in 1918 was largely responsible for the acceleration and the completeness of the victory. Infantry comparisons are therefore misleading, and when used in controversial attacks on Governments deliberately confuse the issue for those who are ignorant of the make-up of modern armies. It has been suggested for instance, that the Government had only provided for the British Army in France for the whole of 1918 a reinforcement of 100,000. This is, of course, flagrantly untrue.

The letter from the War Office to Sir Douglas Haig on 3rd November, 1917, dealing with the man-power outlook, explained that the total man-power in sight to meet his needs for the next twelve months including new recruits and recovered sick and wounded would be 688,000. But while this number of 688,000 was anticipated as available to make up his man-power, it would not all be used up by the infantry. There were other imperative calls, of which the most formidable was 110,000 to be used to form entirely new units for the flying corps, the artillery, the machine-gun corps, tanks and military railways, while a further 80,000 were set aside for maintaining the strength of existing formations of these mechanical arms. Obviously, such arms as tanks and machine-guns were worth, in effect, many times the number of their personnel, compared with infantry. So that if a proportion of men was deducted from potential infantry reinforcements and sent, instead, as new units of these mechanical arms that were coming to play a rapidly growing part in the conflict, the net result was to multiply, not to diminish, the value of the man-power supplied for the line. But the rigid traditionalism of the military authorities never fully appreciated this lesson, which was the most conspicuous discovery and development of the War. When the War Office gave us its estimates of man-power requirements, the men set aside for these formidable engines of war were not counted. The figures given to the Government were those of "rifle strength." It mattered not that a single tank with its crew might be capable of forcing a break in an enemy line more efficiently and cheaply than a whole company of infantry; that half a dozen machine-guns, well placed, could hold up a battalion. That was no consolation for the fact that potential reinforcements for the infantry had been withheld. If these new-fangled weapons, which had played no part in the lessons taught them at the Staff College, must be used—and it was gradually acknowledged that they had a subsidiary value—then they must be manned without detriment to the numbers of the infantry.

Up to this hour, when a case has to be made against the Government of the day for neglect of its duty to the Army, or an excuse manufactured for Generals who have failed, the figures quoted are always confined to the infantry. The drain on man-power involved

n providing the vast increases in the mechanical powers of the Army, n artillery, machine-guns, tanks, aeroplanes and railways behind the lines, is completely ignored, although these appliances multiply the power of the Army a hundredfold. Since the early days of the War the mechanical weapons of offence on the British side had multiplied enormously. The heavy artillery once numbered in tens could now be counted in thousands, and in weight, calibre and range they were vastly more powerful. The machine-guns, of which there were few scanty hundreds in 1914, by 1918 had mounted up to scores of thousands. Tanks were not even thought of in those early days. Now they played an essential part in any great offensive. As for the increase in aircraft, it was immeasurable, alike in numbers and in power. Infantry were still essential to hold the line, and to exploit the activities of the mechanical arms, but every infantryman to-day counted for many times more than he did in those gloomy days when he could be bombarded with impunity in his trenches, and when the feeble artillery with which he was supported could not even tear gaps in the barbed wire against which he was called upon to advance, let alone destroy the trenches which sheltered the enemy riflemen or the machine-gun emplacements which mowed down our advancing troops. Mechanical appliances of all kinds rendered the deadly duties of the infantry easier and less costly. But increasing appliances implied the need of more and more men to handle them, and less and less pure riflemen to support them. The artillery tore up barbed wire, smashed the trenches and emplacements that provided cover for enemy riflemen and machine-gunners, protected advancing troops with a barrage of shell; the tanks crashed through all obstacles and thus gave facility and support for the attacking infantrymen. The aeroplanes not only helped by observation, but they took part in the fight. In the battle of the spring where our infantry were hard pressed by the enemy our aeroplanes attacked from the air with bomb and machine-gun and helped to relieve the pressure and to check the speed of the German advance. It is only those who survived Neuve Chapelle, Festubert and Loos, where our infantrymen were shot down at leisure in front of unbroken barbed wire, who knew what the enormous improvement in mechanisation meant to the British infantry. No infantryman would ever complain if these machines were rendered more powerful, even if the size of his division was thereby reduced.

The enormous improvement in our communications behind the line also constituted a source of new strength to our armies. Hundreds of miles of new roads and railways were constructed by us to facilitate transport of men and material directly to the line and laterally from one part of the line to another. The facility and speed with which troops could be moved from one part of the front to the other made it unnecessary to mass such large numbers of troops

on any one sector. This fact is noted by the famous German Staff officer, Colonel Wetzell, in the advice he gave to Ludendorff prior to the March offensive: —

“We are in a position very quickly to transfer extraordinarily large forces by rail, but our enemy on the Western Front can do so in a still higher degree, thanks to the excellent railway communications behind his front. Besides, both hostile armies possess a very large number of motor vehicles, which have already often contributed decisive services (Verdun) by the rapid bringing up of reinforcements. . . . In view of the favourable and numerous railway communications the possibility of very rapid counter-measures from the north by the British, and from the south by the French, must be regarded as on the cards. We must reckon with certainty that, should we have a striking initial success, we shall soon be involved in a wearisome struggle with the main forces of both our opponents.”

Colonel Wetzell was right in his apprehension that the German offensive would be wrecked by the excellent communications developed behind the Allied lines. These railways and roads saved our Third and Fifth Armies from being overwhelmed by numbers in the spring offensive, and had they been used sooner, would have checked the German advance at an earlier date. They also enabled us to check the German break-through on the Lys by the timely transport of reinforcements. Roads and railways are a fundamental part of the equipment of a modern army. They are formidable weapons of war. It is interesting to note that this improvement in our communications was achieved by a civilian reorganisation of the transport arrangements in France, which was forced upon the War Office in September, 1916. It led to a conflict between myself and the Army Council at the time. Nevertheless, it turned out to be one of the outstanding successes of the War. These communications not only saved us from disaster in March and April, they also contributed materially to that rapid concentration of troops and guns which broke up the German Armies in the autumn of 1918.

But all these mechanical improvements which constituted such a feature of this war involved the diversion on a great scale of manpower from infantry and cavalry to other and newer services. Every other army in the field recognised that fact at a fairly early stage, and consequently reduced the traditional standard of numbers in their brigades and divisions. The Germans were the first to recognise that machine guns automatically multiplied the numbers of their riflemen. The French soon followed suit. We were the last to perceive the shift of values, and adapt our divisional formations to it.



Nothing will enable us better to understand how thoroughly the developments of the War changed the distribution of man-power in the Army than a comparison of the figures of 1914 with those in the last year of the War. These are set out in the following table, showing the total strength of the British Army, Regular and Territorial Forces (excluding Colonial and Indian troops) at home and abroad in August, 1914, and March, 1918. In connection with the figures for August, 1914, it should be pointed out that more than half the total nominal strength consisted of Territorial troops, who were only very partially trained, and were unready for full active service for months. Their number is given alongside the grand total of the 1914 forces in which they are included:—

ARM OR BRANCH	AUGUST, 1914		MARCH, 1918
	TOTAL	Territorial (included in previous column)	
Cavalry ... ..	46,496	(25,418)	89,074
Artillery: Light ... ..	58,766	(39,977)	339,135
Heavy ... ..	27,275		194,540
Royal Engineers ... ..	24,035	(13,808)	304,241
Foot Guards and Infantry ...	306,654	(166,701)	1,750,202
Cyclist Corps ... ..	—	—	20,430
Machine-Gun Corps ... ..	—	—	100,879
Tank Corps ... ..	—	—	20,173
Royal Flying Corps ... ..	1,200	—	144,078
Royal Army Service Corps ...	14,491	(8,184)	318,700
Royal Army Medical Corps ...	17,840	(13,770)	141,740
R.A.O.C., R.A.V.C., A.P.C. ...	3,588	(153)	78,966
Labour Corps ... ..	—	—	348,555
Non-Combatant Corps ... ..	—	—	3,277
TOTAL ... ..	500,345	(268,011)	3,889,990

From this table it will be seen that the infantry strength of the Army was multiplied nearly sixfold, but the other branches (excluding cavalry which just doubled) increased fourteenfold. The augmentation of the mechanical power of our forces 14 times represents a much higher multiple in the striking-power of the Army as a whole. Another feature of this increase which had a direct bearing on the criticisms directed against the War Cabinet is the fact that the army commanded by Marshal Haig had a much higher percentage of this mechanical reinforcement in proportion to the total numbers of the men in a given theatre of war than any of our armies on any other front. The "side-shows" were very skimpily treated in the matter of artillery—especially heavy artillery and aeroplanes. Tanks were a luxury almost completely denied to these abominations.

In view of these striking figures it is simply dishonest to dwell on the numbers of riflemen in the infantry as if that represented fairly the efforts made by the Government in the supply of man-power for our forces at the various fronts. There is only one explanation for it.

The enormous increase in mechanical power—artillery, ammunition, machine-guns, aeroplanes, tanks and transport—was due to the initiative, vision and enterprise of civilians.

It was not easy for the Cabinet in face of the medley of discrepant figures and estimates presented to it, to decide what the real needs of the Army were. And that knowledge was an essential preliminary to any prudent apportionment of our dwindling man-power to the best advantage amongst the competing claims of vital services for a share in it.

As we had been advised that the War would probably continue until 1919 and that we must contemplate the probability of having to provide for the requirements of two more campaigns, we decided in December, 1917, to set up a special Committee of the Cabinet to examine the whole question of man-power and submit proposals as to the action it would be desirable to take to deal with this problem. The Committee consisted of Lord Curzon, Mr. G. N. Barnes, Sir Edward Carson and General Smuts, with myself in the chair. The figures were obtained by the Ministry of National Service from the Departments concerned including the War Office.

The problems reviewed were: the comparative strength of the Allies and the enemy on the Western Front; the existing reserves available on both sides; the civilian man-power in Britain; the purposes it was needed to serve; and the amount of it which could be made available for military use. Here the general principle adopted by the Committee was that the chief aim must be to safeguard the staying power of all the Allies until the Americans could come into the fray with their great resources and turn the scale in our favour. And that safeguarding must involve the maintenance not only of the armies, but of the nations as a whole.

The "Official History" declares, in a tone of censure, that not one of the members of this Committee was a soldier. That General Smuts should be classed as "no soldier" is surely a consummate example of the workings of the professional military mind. True, he had not devoted all his life to soldiering: neither had Sir Douglas Haig's Chief of the Staff, Sir Herbert Lawrence. Those who had campaigned against Smuts in the South African War could hardly deny his remarkable military quality. And in the Great War, after a brilliant campaign in German South-West Africa, he commanded during 1916 our forces in East Africa in the fight with von Lettow-Vorbeck. In any case, this was a Committee of the Cabinet, composed of Ministers of the Crown, responsible not only for governing the country and guarding all the interests of its citizens, but also for the direction of the War as a whole on sea and land. The Army had no such wide responsibility, and army officers as such obviously could have neither the knowledge nor the authority to settle matters involving the whole economic life of the nation and its whole war effort, diplomatic, naval,

industrial, commercial and financial. The Army had no special knowledge of these problems, and could claim no more right than the Navy, the Ministry of Munitions, the Treasury, the Board of Trade, the Ministries of Labour and of Agriculture, the Shipping, Coal or Food Controllors to a representative on the Committee. But the Man-power Committee were supplied with all figures possessed by the General Staff of the War Office, bearing upon their investigation, and the Director of Military Intelligence and the Adjutant-General attended on behalf of the War Office to give such further explanations as the Committee might require on these matters. Every draft of the Report was submitted to the War Office for its observations. Thus the insinuation of the Official History that the military view was not represented at the Committee's sessions is disingenuous.

Among the main features of the Report noted above, the first was that of the comparative strength of the Allies and the enemy on the Western Front. After the Report was first drafted, the General Staff came to the conclusion that the figures under this head which it had supplied were too favourable, and submitted revised figures. Yet even these could hardly be regarded as seriously alarming.

According to the General Staff's amended tables, the position in the West in December, 1917, was that the Allies had  $169\frac{1}{2}$  divisions on the French Front against 151 German divisions; and a combatant strength of 3,420,000 (exclusive of 11,800 Indian troops) compared with 2,536,000 for the Germans—i.e., an Allied superiority of  $18\frac{1}{2}$  divisions, and of 884,000 combatant troops. On the Italian Front the Allies had a superiority to the combined Austrian and German forces of 409,000 combatants.

Despite this considerable superiority, we had been unable to break the German Front. As a matter of fact, ever since 1915 the Allies had held on the Western Front a marked advantage in numbers. In 1917 this amounted to more than seven Allied to four German soldiers. At the end of 1917 the combined total combatant strength (not ration strength) of the French and British forces in all theatres of war was 3,700,000, while that of the Germans on all fronts, East and West, was 3,400,000. If the total forces of the Allies on all fronts (including Italians, Belgians, Portuguese, etc.) be compared with the total forces of the Central Powers and their Turk and Bulgar allies, then the Allies, without including any Russians or Roumanians, had a combatant strength of 5,400,000 against a combatant strength of 5,200,000 for the Central Powers.

Russians and Roumanians were excluded from this calculation; but even if they concluded a separate peace with Germany, she would still have to maintain a considerable force on her Eastern Front, for reasons I give in another chapter. She could transfer a number of divisions to the West; enough to exceed the Allied Armies in the



number of divisional formations, and approximately to equal them in rifle strength, though not in artillery, tanks and aeroplanes. But if the Allies, with a seven to four superiority, had been unable to break through the German lines in 1917, was there any reason to suppose that the Germans, with approximately equal rifle strength, with troops whose quality was poor and whose fighting value was low (according to Haig's memorandum of 8th October, 1917), would be able to break through the Allied lines in the spring of 1918, especially as the mechanical strength and mobility of the enemy was definitely inferior to that possessed by the Allies?

We had to take full cognisance of the fact that the superiority we still held in December, 1917, was rapidly diminishing owing to the transference of German troops from Russia, and that by the following spring there might be proximate equality until the Americans arrived. The Committee was bound to consider what the position would be in May, 1918, assuming that the Germans were able to withdraw from the Russian Front all the divisions they could afford to take away, having regard to the disturbed condition of that country and the need for organising its resources to supply German deficiencies in food and raw materials. The revised estimate of the Staff was that 41 divisions might be thus transferred, including 824,000 combatant troops. The possibility was also envisaged of Austrian divisions being brought to the front, but this, quite correctly, as it turned out, was reckoned to be improbable in any appreciable numbers.

On the Allied side, the possibility was noted that troops might be transferred to France from other fronts. We were of opinion, as were the Versailles Council, that British and French divisions ought to be withdrawn from Italy or in the alternative that Italian divisions should be brought to France. For the delays that occurred in bringing troops from Italy the General Staffs were entirely responsible. It was their business and not that of the Governments concerned to make arrangements for the transfer once they had secured the assent of the Government to the removal. The Governments concerned not only approved that course but actually suggested and urged it. It was also contemplated that in the event of an emergency, troops should be withdrawn from Egypt and Palestine, as we were ridiculously over-insured in our Turkish campaigns. It had been decided to fill three white divisions with Indian troops in order to bring the British units to France. Here also there were unaccountable and reprehensible delays on the part of the military authorities. But, apart from these reinforcements drawn from other theatres, the main hope of additional formations lay with the advent of American troops. How soon these would materialise was uncertain, but General Bliss at that time hoped to have ten fighting and two replacement divisions in France by May, and as many more by December, 1918. It will be remembered that an American division had three times as many men as a British, French or German division.

Passing from the question of additional reinforcing formations to that of reserves, the Committee set out the estimates of the numbers of men on each side that would be available for maintaining the strength of these formations and making good the casualties during 1918. On the German side, assuming that some 76,000 men could be drawn from defence divisions left on the Eastern Front, after the 41 active divisions above mentioned, had been transferred to the West, the total reserves that would be available in the course of the year would be 926,000. On the Allied side, the estimated reserves in sight during the year—British, French and American—were put at 1,356,400. This included an estimated 202,400 American reserves, in addition to the 20 fighting divisions it was hoped they would supply before the end of 1918. Actually the American contribution vastly exceeded this estimate before the conclusion of hostilities in November, 1918, owing to the special arrangements we made for carrying American troops across the Atlantic in British ships.

There were, the Committee pointed out, other non-statistical considerations, such as generalship, organisation, national morale, fighting quality. The Allies had, as an ultimate resource, the vast potentialities of the United States, and there were fewer boys and elderly men in their forces than in the enemy ranks. They also had more artillery, tanks, aeroplanes and available lorries on the Western Front. The German defenders of the March offensive before the Reichstag Committee claimed that they had a *slight* superiority in numbers, but admitted that they were inferior in guns and other mechanical equipment. All our experience of offensives on the Western Front justified us in believing that under these conditions the Germans would not possess the necessary superiority to break through the Allied lines and defeat our armies—always provided these armies were reasonably well handled. No mathematical superiority can save unintelligent leadership from disaster. After reckoning all these factors, the Man-power Committee of the Cabinet concluded that they:—

“do not appear to modify the general conclusion to be drawn from the man-power figures, that the Allies ought to be able to hold their own on the Western Front until the period when the increase of American strength begins to alter the balance of advantage in their favour.”

Despite an unusual display of strategical and tactical ineptitude in the Allied conduct of the spring operations, this forecast was justified by the event.

From this branch of the survey, the Committee proceeded to an examination of the remaining man-power of Britain, the uses to which it was being put, the nature of the demands for it, and the number

that could be taken from other services for our armed forces—naval as well as military. They considered the requests for further recruits made by all the Services, the calculations upon which those requests were based; the numbers and occupations of men of military age still in civilian life, and the degree of urgency of demand for their work; and recommended a number of further measures, administrative and legislative, to secure the best distribution of our man-power and the maximum contribution to the Army.

The demands laid before the Committee by the Services for additional able-bodied recruits to be withdrawn from civilian work and handed over to them, amounted to 90,000 new men for the Navy and R.N.A.S. and 600,000 for the Army. These demands were additional to those for lower-category men for non-combatant work with the Army and Air Force, and for the recruitment of all youths fit for service as they reached the age of 18.

The representatives of the Navy could give the Committee no figures analysing the basis of their demand for 90,000 new men; so that the Committee could not scrutinise this estimate. However, in their recommendations, the Committee made an allowance of 50,000 for the Navy out of the number of "A" men they thought it possible to withdraw from civilian work.

The demand of the Army for an additional 600,000 recruits from the civilian population was based upon a long and elaborate series of calculations. Several of the items of this series were by no means convincing.

The Army authorities placed their gross demand for an additional supply of men during 1918 at 1,304,000. This figure represented:—

165,300 men wanted for expanding the flying corps and artillery, and creating new units in such growing services as machine-gun corps, tanks, etc.

95,000 to make up the Army in France to establishment.

671,700 to replace wastage in the Army in France up to 30th September, 1918.

192,000 to replace wastage in other theatres to 31st October.

160,000 to be in training to meet wastages in all theatres between October and the end of January, 1919.

20,000 to replace skilled shipwrights which the Army was being asked to release to aid the ship-building programme.

To meet this gross demand for 1,304,000 men, the Army authorities reckoned they would be able to draft 449,000 "A" men from the forces at home, up to 31st October, 1918, while of the sick and wounded becoming fit for general service they reckoned there would be 240,000. Together these totalled 689,000, leaving 615,000 deficit on their estimated requirements.



Now in the argument presented by these figures there were obvious gaps, to some of which the Committee drew attention.

To begin with, the 165,000 men to expand the mechanical strength of the army could not be treated as a deficit to be made up. Quite the reverse. It would obviously not entail any reduction in the total number of our combatant forces, if the men required for expanding the artillery and flying corps and creating fresh units for tanks and machine-gun corps, were drawn from the ranks of existing recruits. True, such a process would deplete the infantry establishment, but all these new formations gave redoubled support and strength to the infantry. As our supplies of cannon grew more lavish, we could economise more on "cannon-fodder."

Since there was not the man-power available to expand these new units to the extent desired and at the same time keep all our infantry divisions reinforced up to the full traditional establishment, it became a question of either cutting down the number of divisional formations, or of reducing the establishment of ordinary infantry in each division. The second course was that recommended and already adopted by all the other leading belligerent armies. It had been urged upon us by the French for some time. In order to secure the fullest advantage from the new weapons now available—machine-guns, trench mortars, etc.—and the greatly increased artillery strength, it was clearly necessary to attach full complements of these to as many infantry formations as possible. To achieve this end, a reduction of the number of battalions in a division from twelve to nine had already been carried out by both the French and the German Armies, and the numbers constituting each battalion had also been reduced. This reduction did not mean that the resources of these two belligerent countries had become exhausted. Indeed, Germany had a larger number of men in the various battlefields in 1918 than she had in 1914. But the enormous increase in the mechanical power at the disposal of her armies had rendered it necessary that she should allocate a considerable proportion of her men to the new units thus created. The net result was that with diminished numbers of infantry her divisions were three times as powerful as they were at the commencement of the War.

Sir Douglas Haig, however, was opposed to such a reconstruction. He held that if through shortage of man-power it were impossible to keep the divisions up to the existing infantry establishment, it would be preferable to break up some of them, rather than to reduce them to nine battalions each. Foch, on the other hand, was always specially insistent on the importance of keeping up the number of divisional formations, even although it were found impossible to maintain the standard number of troops in each division. The German Staff took the same line, until their divisions were so reduced that they consisted of only 2,000 or 3,000 men. It could hardly be suggested that the

military authorities of France and Germany were inferior to the British in expert knowledge and sound judgment on problems of military organisation. Yet alike our Army Council and our Commander-in-Chief protested bitterly against such a reorganisation and as usual blamed the politicians. They were accustomed to 12<sup>3</sup> battalion divisions, and they could not understand that methods of warfare had been revolutionised since the days of the Expeditionary Force of 1914 when we depended on the firing efficiency of our riflemen and their skill in bayonet practice, and when our artillery was almost entirely light; when we had few aeroplanes, still fewer heavy guns, not many machine-guns and no tanks.

The Cabinet Committee on Man-power strongly urged that we should follow the example of the French and Germans by reducing the number of infantry men in a division. The Army objections to it were obviously ill-founded. Indeed, the "Official History," while it feels in duty bound to support the Army Council and the Commander-in-Chief in their protests, cannot pretend to accept their reasons, and fumbles for a different ground. The Official Historian writes:—

"It was not so much the nature of the change—which would indeed increase the proportion of guns per thousand infantry, *which was eminently desirable*—but the time selected for it which was open to objection."

It would be interesting to know what better time than January and February—a quiet time at the front—could have been chosen for an "eminently desirable" change. The diary of the War shows that there was a complete cessation of all serious military operations on the Western Front from the end of December, 1917, to the middle of March, 1918. It was the longest quiet spell we had known for two years.

The reduction of the divisional establishments advised by the Committee was finally ordered by the War Office on 10th January, 1918. It was anticipated that the change over would be complete by 15th February. Actually, it was carried through more slowly. Only three of the four armies in France completed their divisional reorganisation before the end of February, the Fourth Army finishing it on 4th March. The infantry holding Passchendaele must not be reduced until the last possible moment whatever happened elsewhere! The whole affair, including the wrath of the Army Council and the Commander-in-Chief at the proposal, the dilatoriness with which it was finally carried through, and the lingering resentment at it displayed by the Official History, furnishes a melancholy illustration of that rigidity and reluctance to adopt new methods to fit new conditions, which so constantly handicapped our efforts in the War and

cost us needlessly heavy casualties. It was left for civilians to force on the Army the use and development of tanks, machine-guns and machine-gun corps, heavy guns, high explosives, improved transport and all other means of economising man-power and heightening its efficiency. It is perhaps worth noting in this connection that on 15th January, 1918, the War Cabinet decided to send a telegram to the Military Representatives on the Supreme War Council at Versailles, saying that:—

“In order to secure the advantage of the experience of other Allied Armies, the Military Representatives at Versailles are requested to report as soon as possible on the economising of man-power, casualties and tonnage, which might be effected by the fullest and most scientific employment of machine-guns, automatic rifles, tanks, and other mechanical devices.”

The second matter queried by the Cabinet Committee was the estimated rate of wastage. It was at a higher rate than that experienced in 1917, when we had been continually on the offensive in the most sanguinary fighting. Further, French experience showed that the *net* wastage (total casualties less the number of wounded and sick that returned to the forces) represented only 25 per cent. of the combatant strength; whereas the War Office was calculating a 55 per cent. rate. The British Army had of course been fighting hard on the offensive all through 1917; but as it was to stand on the defensive for the early part of 1918, the Committee considered that the military estimate was likely to prove unduly large.

In their reply to the Committee, the Army Council were indignant at the suggestion that the defence cost less than the attack. They wrote:—

“There is nothing in the experience of this war or in any other to support the argument that a defensive policy necessarily entails fewer losses than an offensive policy, once fighting begins, and therefore in the opinion of the Military Members the adoption of a defensive policy does not justify making provision for a lower rate of wastage than that estimated by the War Office. . . .”

The actual experience of the War as a whole, as since ascertained, disproves this contention of the Army Council. The casualty figures in the War, secured as the result of very careful inquiry by the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, in 1922, show conclusively that in the course of our offensives—and except for the spring of 1918, our forces in France were almost continually acting on the offensive—our total casualties were as three to two of the Germans opposite our front. On the Somme, in Flanders and elsewhere, we habitually suffered at least 50 per cent. more casualties than



we inflicted. On the other hand, in the big German offensives of March and April, the proportion was reversed. Between 21st March and 30th April, 1918, the total losses in killed and wounded along the British Front were: British, 209,466; German 308,825. It is true that on account of the big sweep forward achieved by the Germans, our losses during this period in prisoners and missing were heavier than theirs. But when these further losses on both sides were added, the balance is still against the Germans, the total figures being respectively: British, 302,869; German, 348,769. The Germans were often accused by our military authorities of understating their casualties, especially in the latter part of the War. If there is substance in this charge then the German casualties during their offensive must have been still more heavy than ours.

The killed are of course the final casualties, for a considerable proportion of wounded recover and return to active service. In the British Army the proportion that recovered and returned to the forces was five out of nine, while of the remainder, the larger part recovered sufficiently to return to civil life and take up work which released other men for the Army. In the number of *killed* during the German offensives of March and April, the respective losses were: British, 28,128; German, 56,639. Thus in killed alone, the Germans lost more than twice as many as the British.

When, later in the summer, we resumed the offensive, our casualties again became three to two of the Germans.

In the estimates submitted by the Military Authorities to the Manpower Committee, the figure of wastage in other theatres appeared to be particularly excessive. The actual total casualties in all theatres other than France during 1917 were 48,000. The Army Council put the figure for 1918 at 192,000. Even after making a generous allowance for contingencies, the Ministry of National Service thought that 120,000 would be ample under this head. Whether the number wanted would prove to be 120,000 or 192,000, it was clear that comparatively few of them would be required in these other theatres till well on in the year, so that if an emergency arose in France in the spring, the drafts for our Eastern Armies would still be available for the French Front.

While the War Office estimates of the number of additional recruits they would need in 1918 were thus magnified by every artifice, their reckoning of the numbers they could dispose of to supply their needs, apart from further recruits from the adult civil population, were cut down to the lowest point. Even the Official History seems to be somewhat surprised at their assumption that they would only be able to furnish 449,000 men to the Overseas forces out of the troops they had available in Britain. According to the War Office returns, there were on 1st January, 1918, in the United Kingdom 74,403 officers and 1,486,459 other ranks of the British Army, of whom 38,225 officers were

fit for general service, while of the "other ranks," 607,403 were then "available," 78,886 belonged to permanent cadres, and the remainder, some 800,170, were recruits in training, men engaged in administrative services, and "indispensables." A large proportion of these 800,000 recruits under training would before long become fit to send overseas if wanted. Upwards of 100,000 of them were lads under 19 years old. A pledge had been given in Parliament regarding these that only in the event of a grave national emergency should they be sent out of the country before they had completed their nineteenth year. After the March offensive 19 was reduced to 18½. Here we followed the example of Germany and France. Altogether it seemed reasonable to assume that if a crisis arose, a far larger number than 449,000 in all could be supplied from the Home Army to the Expeditionary forces, especially since the military bogey of a German invasion of Britain had now been definitely laid.

In addition to these large forces of British troops retained on British soil there were also in Britain, belonging to the Overseas contingents, 8,324 officers, of whom 4,493 were fit for general service, and 187,491 other ranks (excluding permanent cadres), of whom 41,065 were recorded as "available."

It has been suggested that I was responsible for keeping these great masses of men at home because of my "obsession" as to the danger of a German invasion. I have never entertained such a fear. In fact I always regarded it as a bogey invented by those who wanted to re-establish permanent conscription. I agreed with the decision of the Asquith Government that the Germans could not possibly accomplish more than a rush and a raid without artillery support.

Thus apart from any further contribution which might still be squeezed from the numbers of "A" men still in civilian occupations, it is evident that the Army authorities had under their hand, already in khaki, a quite considerable body of troops on which to draw for reinforcing their Overseas Armies, and all they had to do was to make the best use of them. On the whole, therefore, the Committee were justified in coming to the conclusion that, with the enormous reserves of men trained or in training at home and with arrangements the Ministry of National Service had made and was still making to increase these numbers, our forces ought to be able to hold out in 1918 until the Americans turned equality into decisive superiority, provided meanwhile certain measures were taken to economise losses and make the fullest and most skilful use of the men available. Among the measures proposed by the Man-power Committee were that every effort should be made to avoid the appalling waste of man-power hitherto sustained, by the adoption of suitable strategy and tactics, and by the improvement of the defences; that the divisions should be cut down from four battalions per brigade to three; that the bulk of the cavalry should be broken up and used to reinforce the tank corps and flying corps: and

that the Home Army should be drawn on much more heavily to reinforce the Overseas Armies, and also to provide the "B" category men required for auxiliary work. The French and Germans put this class in the trenches to hold the quieter parts of the line. The Germans had 14 divisions of Landsturm troops in the line. Both Haig and the War Office declined to follow this course. They would have nothing but "A" men for the war zones. In the course of the summer of 1918 on the advice of Foch this objection was dropped by our Generals with excellent results. The "B" men did well.

There was comfort in knowing that the needs of the Army, if serious, were not so desperate as some of the figures submitted were intended to convey, and that a good deal could be done to improve the prospects by a verification of War Office statistics, and the rest achieved by a more efficient utilisation of the existing supply of manpower in the Army itself. When the Committee turned to examine the residue of man-power still left in civilian work in this country, they found that it was very nearly exhausted, and certainly could not be expected to furnish that 600,000 "A" recruits, additional to lads reaching 18, and lower-category men, for which the Army was asking.

There were still  $3\frac{1}{2}$  million men of military age in civilian occupations in Great Britain; but of these only 950,000 were fit for general service. Of these 950,000, some 355,000 were in munition works and shipyards, 330,000 were in coal-mining or agriculture, 187,000 were in railways, transport and public utility occupations, and the balance of 78,000 men were a carefully combed remnant in a variety of positions where hitherto they had been considered indispensable by the tribunals. From the practical point of view it would have been impossible to remove all these men from their jobs. On the one hand, much of the work was of a heavy nature, for which men physically fit were essential. Fit men were needed for the mercantile marine, for shipbuilding and ship-repairing yards, for coal-mining, forges, rolling mills, heavy armament manufacture, for hewing timber, agriculture, railways and other industries and utilities. Further, numbers of men fit for general service had been retained perforce in their positions because they were highly skilled and irreplaceable—skilled engineers, key men in industry, commerce, finance, public administration—and were more valuable to the nation where they were than in shouldering a rifle. Not a few had been brought back from the Army to the factories by the Government for that reason. Indeed, at this very time we were scouring the Army for another 20,000 skilled shipwrights, urgently required for our ship-building programme, to make good the losses inflicted by the German submarines. Our shipping, always vital to the nation for its very existence, was about to play in 1918 an even more spectacular part in the promotion of the Allied victory by bringing over American troops to France. By



making that feat of transport possible, the men retained in the ship-yards or brought back to them from the Army contributed a reinforcement of many times their number to the forces in France.

Thus although dilution, the substitution of women workers and of men medically rejected by the Army examiners for those who could be recruited for general service, was being steadily pressed forward, there were numbers of tasks and of men to which it could not be successfully applied. The Army authorities became ruffled and red with impatience at the sight of any fit man not in khaki. But the Army authorities had not to shoulder the responsibility for governing the country and maintaining all its manifold essential activities—a fact which neither they nor some of their historians and apologists seem to have realised.

Further, in considering this question of dilution of skilled occupations, and the removal of "A" men, whose well-paid jobs would be taken by others less fit for military service, it has to be borne in mind, as I pointed out in a previous chapter\* that Britain had not the same background of social training as Continental nations for the acceptance of universal compulsory military service. On the Continent, lads grew up from early childhood with the knowledge that in due time they must unquestioningly take their place in the Army and serve their time there, and that if a national emergency arose, they would be recalled to the Army as a matter of course, whatever work they might be doing. But in Britain the Army had always been a voluntary service. The notion that men should be forced to throw up well-paid work to engage in this riskiest, worst paid and most tethered of all professions, however unwillingly, was quite a new principle, with no backing of social tradition, while the labour dilution which was its corollary was equally a menace to the slowly built fabric of trade unionist regulations designed to protect the worker against inroads on his craft. The Unions had accepted such measures, I will not say grudgingly, but with misgivings and only because they were forced by the extremity of the war emergency. Patriotism is the last stand of every creed and these Union leaders conceded to the needs of the country what they would not surrender to any other appeal. We had to apply these concessions carefully, with tact not tyranny. Entire nations are not yet—not even in war—on the parade ground where Ministers can bellow at them orders which must be implicitly and promptly obeyed on peril of the guard-room. There are countries moving in that direction. But in the days of Imperial autocracy even the docile Russian rebelled in the end against such a disciplinary exaction.

Thus in reckoning the maximum limit of further levies which might be made upon the "A" men still in civilian callings we had to take care not only to avoid crippling essential services, but also to

\* Chap. XXIII: The Coming of Conscription.

preserve peace on the home front. The residue of fit men in the ranks of labour consisted in large part either of those who had not felt called upon to volunteer for the Army, or had been deterred from doing so by pressure from the management of the concerns which could not have been kept going without their help. To these must be added those who had actually volunteered, and even in some cases had gone out to France, but had been sent back to mine or factory or dockyard because their services there were judged indispensable. These latter men did not want to be played about with. They were mainly volunteers. Had they been left in the Army, they would have done their duty there. Being released from it without their own effort, and told they could best serve their country at home, they would have felt naturally aggrieved if they had again been dragged out and thrust into khaki, labelled as conscripts and flung into unhealthy salients to spend their winter. The squeezing process in Germany of the last few months of the War was driving tens of thousands into desertion and ere many months passed it drove hundreds of thousands into rebellion which overthrew the throne. Some of the more powerful Trade Unions were showing signs of becoming resistant to the pressure for combing out more of their men for the front.

Thus in weighing up the question of what further fit men we could withdraw from civilian services for the Army and Navy we had on the one hand to examine what number could be taken without causing a material disorganisation or breakdown of essential industries, and on the other, how far we could revive press-gang tactics by pouncing on eligible individuals here and there without provoking a psychological reaction that would create more disastrous trouble than the number of men obtained would be worth. Government is in part a science but it is more of an art. To be a success there must be not only regulation but understanding.

The Cabinet Committee on Man-power came to the conclusion that as regards the relative urgency of demand between the different essential services, first place must be given to the Navy. As I have already noted, its maintenance was clearly of supreme importance to the nation and to the Allies. If it failed, overwhelming disaster to the Allied cause was inevitable. With it was bracketed the Air Force. The development of aviation during the War had given this branch of the Service an importance beyond the conjecture of any military teacher before the War. Supremacy in the air had become one of the essentials of victory. This arm had also an importance of its own for the defence of our cities against hostile attack. Shipping, which included shipbuilding and repairing as well as manning, came next. For feeding and supplying the nation, for carrying troops, munitions and rations to the different theatres of war, for assisting our Allies, for bringing over American troops, it was vital to make good the shipping shortage which the submarine war had created. Of

hardly less importance was to be reckoned the manufacture of the mechanism and munitions of war. This included coal production for ourselves and the Allies. After these in order of merit were placed food production and timber felling.

While in this list the requirements of the fighting personnel of the Navy and Air Force were given absolute priority over all other services, the supply of man-power to the other essential services was made subject to the charge that the Minister of National Service should economise it with the utmost care, in order to make all the provision possible for release of men for the Army. After careful examination of the labour schedules, the Committee on Man-power came to the conclusion that by carrying out some sort of general post with the available labour force in Britain, tending to bring about further dilution of the supply with women and with men of low medical categories, it would be possible to secure in 1918 for the forces from the ranks of men of military age then in civilian life, a further 150,000 men of category "A" and 100,000 men of lower categories.

Of these, they proposed to allot 50,000 category "A" men to the Navy, leaving 100,000 category "A" men and 100,000 men of lower categories for the Army. While these second hundred thousand were not up to the medical standard of fitness for general service, there were a number of tasks to be done in the Army which they could perform, thus releasing from those sources fit men to be taken into the line and increase our combatant strength.

Thus, while the Army was asking for 600,000 recruits of "A" category from the civilian population during 1918, the conclusion of the Committee was that it could only see the possibility by the most drastic combing of securing 100,000 "A" men and another 100,000 men of lower categories in addition to 120,000 youths reaching military age during the year. Reviewing their problem in retrospect, it seems quite clear that they could not at that stage in the War have promised more. The 600,000 demanded by the Army was, for reasons I have given, in any case a figure which could not be justified on the most superficial examination. When the German attack in March, 1918, broke our front, and it became a life and death issue to send abroad every man capable of bearing arms, we slashed desperately at some of our vital war industries, and made encroachments upon the scanty man-power left at home, which nothing but the need for restoring confidence in a momentary panic created by a great defeat could have justified. We got few more recruits for the War, though the effort did help to calm excited nerves. Cuts were then carried out that would have been psychologically impossible previously—cuts to which organised labour would have refused to submit but for the spectacular urgency of the situation. The last available men were thrust into the Army. But even when these desperate expedients were resorted to, it was not found possible to secure any really



considerable additional numbers. As I have stated, the Man-power Committee had proposed a total recruitment of "A" category men in 1918 for Navy and Army (other than boys to be conscripted on reaching the age of 18) of 150,000. The actual number of adult "A" men recruited in 1918 was 284,649—an increase of less than 135,000 over the original estimate, after using the maximum pressure and taking the maximum risks.

A great deal of nonsense had been talked, and many foolish charges brought against the Government of failing to provide a larger number of recruits in the early part of 1918. A somewhat flagrant example of this is a comment contained in the Official History\* in a footnote giving the numbers of troops sent out to France in January-August, 1918. The writer points out that a total of 548,327 "A" men were sent to France during those eight months, and draws the following curious conclusion:—

"It is obvious that the British Armies in France could have been brought up to full establishment before 21st March without unduly weakening forces elsewhere had the Government so willed."

This is an amazing statement to be made by a writer with access to the Official Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire. In the first place, he must be aware that those 548,327 "A" men were not obtainable by recruitment, however much the Government might will it. The great bulk of them had to be, and were, provided by the Army authorities from the troops already in khaki by the beginning of 1918; troops that were under their hand in this country, ready trained or in course of training, or recovering from wounds or sickness. So it would seem that if the Army historian is entitled to make any criticism in this connection, he should direct it against the Army authorities.

But in the second place, it is a grotesque *gaffe* on the part of a military writer to suggest that because men were actually sent out in August, they could equally well have been sent out in March. Of the total troops in this country in March, 1918, including Regular Army, Territorial Force and Overseas contingents from the Dominions, upwards of 700,000 were "A" category officers and men; but of these, only 227,545 officers and men were shown by the War Office returns to be trained and available for dispatch overseas, including all the youths of under 19 who had finished their necessary training. The remainder of the "A" men here at that time were recruits not yet trained, and sick and wounded not yet fully recovered or not "hardened" after recovery in preparation for sending out again. Each month saw a further batch ready for dispatch overseas. But the Official Statistics place it beyond dispute that the men drafted

\* "Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1918," Vol. I, p. 52.

overseas between April and August were not available for that purpose in March. The writer of the Official History must have been aware of these facts or he must have been too busy writing about events to examine the facts—in which case writers are apt to fall back on gossip. He must have known that there was no spectacular expansion of belated recruiting by the Government to bear witness to an earlier neglect; and that the fact of drafts being sent out in August could not be taken as evidence that they were available in March.

The accusation, often made, that at this period the British Government was starving the Army of men will not bear a moment's examination if the official figures published by the War Office are studied. Let us consider those figures in regard to:—

(a) The total strength of the British Army recruited from the United Kingdom.

(b) The total strength of the Expeditionary Forces in all war theatres.

(c) The grand total of British forces of all kinds throughout the Empire.

(a) In March, 1918, the total strength of the British Army, Regular and Territorial, raised in this country—excluding all Dominion, Colonial, Indian and native troops—was 3,889,990.\* This was the colossal giant which the War Cabinet are accused of having reduced to a skeleton army. *It was the highest total strength which the British Army ever reached. At no time in the whole course of the War were there so many men from this country in the ranks of the Army at home and overseas as at the date of the German offensive in March, 1918.* It was the supreme moment of the War, the supreme moment of British history, so far as the massing of our sons into the Army was concerned. Despite all the terrible slaughter of the Somme, and the awful massacres of Passchendaele, our military authorities had under their command in March, 1918, more men than ever before, drawn entirely from the population of this little island.

(b) Similarly, the total British strength in all the theatres of war—our total Expeditionary forces, including Dominion and other Overseas contingents, but excluding coloured labour units, *reached in March, 1918, its high-water mark, with a total of 2,834,690.† This, too, was the record figure for the military effort of the British Empire at any moment during the War.* It included some 253,000 Indian and African troops.

The Expeditionary forces on the Western Front had been sorely depleted by the casualties of the Flanders campaign, which had calamitously exceeded the forecast of probable losses for which we had

\* "Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire, 1914-20," p. 231.

† *ibid.*, Table facing p. 64.

provided. On the eve of that campaign, on 1st August, 1917, the total strength of the B.E.F., France was 2,044,627\* (exclusive of coloured labour units)—the highest figure it reached. You cannot quickly train men and draft them across to replace casualties totalling nearly 400,000. But by 1st March, 1918, the total strength of the B.E.F., France, together with the troops sent along from France to the Italian Front (which the Italians offered to make up by an equal number of their troops) amounted to 2,019,773\*—within 25,000 of the pre-Passchendaele total.

(c) The grand total of all the forces of the Empire, at home, in the various war theatres, in India and garrisoning ports, *reached its maximum in March, 1918, with 5,559,573.†* This included 4,982,254 troops, British, Dominions, India, etc., and 577,319 coloured labour. *Each* of these totals was the highest ever attained in the whole course of the War. It was an immense effort for a commonwealth where universal military service was an unknown tradition in the lives of the people and where this supreme sacrifice of liberty for millions and of home and life for multitudes was incurred in a war waged for the independence of another nation. There was no invader on our soil devastating our towns and villages as in France. We had not, as Italy had, territory and a population which belonged to our race and spoke our language, to be redeemed from a foreign yoke. We fought to vindicate international right which had been outraged by a wrong inflicted on a small country which we were covenanted to protect.

In face of these facts and figures, all of them given in the Official Statistics issued by the War Office, the charge that in the spring of 1918 the Army was being starved of men can be seen to be not only false but silly.

\* "Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire, 1914-20," Table facing p. 64.

† *ibid.*, p. 34.



## CHAPTER LXXII (*continued*)

### THE PROBLEM OF MAN-POWER

#### 2. NEGOTIATIONS WITH LABOUR AND IRELAND

It was by no means an easy matter to carry out the proposal of the Man-power Committee for recruiting a further 150,000 "A" men and 100,000 men of lower categories from the remaining industrial population. The men of military age were an often-sifted residue, all of them holding pledges of absolute or conditional exemption from military service; and to call up a large, fresh batch of them meant anxious diplomacy and frank consultation with the leaders of the Trade Unions. Sir Auckland Geddes, the Minister of National Service, had a general conference with the leaders of Labour, which he had to adjourn early in January, in order to see how far he could reach agreement with each trade union group about the measures it would be necessary to take in their particular industry to carry through this recruiting programme. The General Conference was resumed on 18th January, 1918, when about 350 delegates attended at the Central Hall, Westminster, from all parts of the country.

The chair at this gathering was taken by Mr. George Barnes, the representative of Labour in the Cabinet, and two other Labour holders of Ministerial office, Mr. G. H. Roberts and Mr. Clynes, were also present. At the previous meeting of this Conference on 5th January I had attended and delivered the speech outlining the peace aims of the Allies which is reproduced in Chapter LXX, Appendix II. I also addressed this second meeting of delegates about the situation, and gave the reasons which made it necessary to take further steps to extract men for the Army and Navy from amongst those in their ranks who had been hitherto exempted.

I began by urging the fullest frankness between the Government and the representatives of Labour, and promised to answer, at the end of my speech, any questions on general policy. I then proceeded:—

"With regard to the proposals of the Government, let me say this at the outset as to the method. There are no other alternatives for raising men except either raising the military age, as they have done in Austria, where it is 55, or sending wounded men back and back again into the battle line. . . . As to the urgency of the need,

no man standing like my colleagues and myself on the watch-tower can deny it. Unless the need had been urgent, we should not have brought forward this demand now. . . . The Government view is this: It would be folly to withdraw men from industries one hour sooner than the need arose. On the other hand, it would be treason to the State, treason to our country, treason to democracy, treason to the cause of freedom, if when the need did arise we did not make the demand."

I pointed out that unless we succeeded in resisting the military power of Prussia we could never hope to obtain from the Kaiser and Ludendorff even the most moderate terms that the most pacific of us could dream of accepting. It was not a question of fighting on to gain some big imperialist aim. I had already indicated our peace terms in my speech to them a fortnight before, and President Wilson had almost at the same time put forward substantially the same demand. They had been received in all the Allied countries with acclaim, except perhaps by extremists who thought they should have been stiffer.

"What has been their reception in Germany? I beg you to consider this, especially those who think that we are responsible for perpetuating this horror. I would not have this war for a second on my soul if I could stop it honourably. . . . There has been no response from any man in any position in Germany that indicates a desire on the part of the ruling powers in that land to approach the problem in a spirit of equity.

We demanded the restoration of Belgium. Is there one man here who would make peace without the complete restoration of Belgium and reparation for its wrongs? [Cries of 'No!'] Is there one man? ['No!'] I would like to see him stand up. Is there one man who would do it? What is the answer from Germany? There has been but one answer, and it came from von Tirpitz's soul—'Never!'"

The same answer, I pointed out, was given to the suggestion of the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine, and to the demand that Mesopotamia and Palestine should not be handed back to Turkish tyranny. To the peace aims formulated by the British Trade Unions themselves, there had not been a single favourable response from anyone in Germany with authority to speak. In fact, there had been no civilian statement from Germany at all. Von Kuhlmann had been kept silent by the War Lords, whose only answer to civilisation would be given from the cannon's mouth.

"Do not let us harbour any delusions. . . . You might as well stop fighting unless you are going to do it well. If you are not

going to do it with all your might, it is real murder of gallant fellows who have stood there for three years [Hear, hear]. . . . If there are men who say that they will not go into the trenches, then the men who are in the trenches have a right to say, 'Neither will we remain here!' Supposing they did it, would that bring the War to an end? Yes, it would. But what sort of an end?"

The Russian soldiers, I reminded them, had done that; and the Germans had proceeded to take Riga and the Russian islands. If we stopped now, we should leave Britain as well as France at the mercy of the most relentless military autocracy the world had ever seen. We could not turn Hindenburg out of Belgium with trade union resolutions, but we could with trade union guns and trade unionists behind them. Only by such means could we carry to triumph those great aims which had been put forward alike by the Trade Unionists, the Government and President Wilson as the objects for which we were committed to fight.

"Let us harbour no delusions. We must take the world as it is, and the story of democracy is this: no democracy has ever long survived the failure of its adherents to be ready to die for it. . . . If one profession, one trade, one section, or one class in a community claims to be immune from obligations which are imposed upon the rest, that is a fundamental travesty of the principles of democracy. . . . We are fighting now against the privilege claimed by a military caste. Democracy must mean that the people of all classes . . . must merge their privileges and their rights in the common stock. . . . My own conviction is this, the people must either go on or go under."

At the end of my speech I invited questions, and a number were put, the majority of them bearing upon the issue of whether peace negotiations were possible at this stage, and whether any good end could be served by a meeting of British and German Socialist and Labour representatives at Stockholm or elsewhere. In reply to this question which recurred in several guises, I pointed out that ultimately a peace could only be negotiated by the accredited representatives of a country's Government. The great democracies, America and France, as well as Italy and Britain, all took that view.

". . . It is a fundamental misconception of democracy that any section, however powerful, really represents the whole of the people. Whoever goes there to speak and to negotiate must represent the whole of the country, and not merely a part of it."

I said that I had examined this question very carefully, with an original prejudice in favour of encouraging such sectional conferences; but had been driven to conclude that it would be a very



dangerous experiment. If you let the Socialist sections meet to confer on peace terms, you would have to let other sections do the same—the financiers of Britain and of Germany, the industrialists, merchants and so on. It would all end in confusion. The only effective way was for the people of each country to see that their Government represented their views, and then leave it to negotiate the peace.

A delegate inquired whether I would give an undertaking that the production of armaments here should be nationalised, and private profiteering in these engines of destruction brought to an end. My reply was:—

“All I can say is that, speaking for myself, I am entirely in sympathy with that proposition. I do not think there ought to be any pecuniary incentive to encourage armaments in the world, and I am entirely in sympathy with the spirit of that question.”

Another question raised the issue of our policy in regard to Alsace-Lorraine. To this I replied:—

“I stated the view of the Government, I think, quite clearly last time. My view is that the people of this country will stand by the people of France. It is a question for them to decide. You must remember this is not really a question of territory to them. It has been a question of vital principle. It has been like an open sore in their side for nearly 50 years. They have never been able to live in peace during the whole of that time, and their view undoubtedly is that you cannot have peace in France until you have settled this question once and for ever; and if you cannot have peace in France, you won't have peace in Europe. You must settle this question unless you are going to have a series of wars in Europe.”

Another point which clearly preoccupied the minds of the Labour delegates was the contribution which wealth ought to make to our war effort. Was I going to conscript it?

I answered that “in no country and in no war has wealth been as heavily taxed for war purposes as in this country. Even at this moment the taxation of wealth is higher here than in any other belligerent country, not even excluding Germany, and if my questioner will just look at all the budgets of the world, past and present, he will find we have gone farther on that road than any other country. I do not say that we have come to the end of the path yet.” In another reply to a question about taxation as opposed to borrowing, I pointed out that we had maintained a higher percentage of taxation to borrowing than any other government.

Finally, I assured my hearers that we were at pains to ensure that the war aims of America and the Allies should be consolidated as fully as possible, and that it was our purpose so to settle the peace of the world that it should be possible to do away with conscription, not only here, but in every other country. But unless the strength of militarism was really broken, that would be impossible.

This frank discussion ended in a really good understanding between the Government and the representatives of Labour, and enabled us to secure their agreement for the further measures of recruitment which were necessary to provide the additional numbers of men for the Navy and Army proposed by the Man-power Committee.

A Bill to enact the legislation requisite for enabling us to cancel exemptions and conduct a further comb-out of our man-power had already been introduced by Sir Auckland Geddes, the Minister of National Service, on 14th January. After this understanding had been reached with the representatives of Labour we were able to press the measure rapidly through its further stages, and on 6th February, 1918, it received the Royal Assent. The principal objection raised to it in Parliament came from the Ulster Members, who wanted to include conscription for Ireland in its terms. Sir Auckland Geddes explained that: —

“The reason why the Government excluded any reference to Ireland from this Bill was that in their considered opinion, after fully investigating the matter, they considered that to have included a proposal to apply compulsory military service to Ireland would not have helped on the War. . . . It is not at this time possible to risk delay for weeks and months in getting the measures which we propose into force if we are to obtain the men the Army requires.”\*

This was, however, a question which was to cause us a great deal of trouble during the remainder of the year.

When the great German offensive of March, 1918, drove in our front, we at once made plans for still more drastic measures to raise recruits. At the War Cabinet of 25th March, Sir Auckland Geddes was asked to prepare at the earliest moment a short Bill which would give us powers to raise the age limit for military service to 50 or 55, to conscript the clergy and ministers of religion, to send conscientious objectors abroad for labour services, and to extend conscription to Ireland. This last question gave rise to serious differences of opinion in the Cabinet, as it subsequently did in and out of Parliament. The divisions did not altogether follow Party lines. Bonar Law was just as doubtful as I was about the wisdom of the project.

\* Official Report, 17th January, 1918, Vol. 101, Col. 579.

But other Unionist members of the War Cabinet were insistent upon it, and we learned that Labour would be restive at the further drastic extensions we proposed if the manhood of Ireland were left untouched. Mr. Duke, the Chief Secretary, was strongly opposed to it as a method of recruiting the Army, and on 27th March he laid before us a Memorandum from General Mahon, the G.O.C., Irish Command, with additions inserted in italics by General Byrne, the head of the Royal Irish Constabulary. This ran:—

“Conscription can be enforced, but with *the greatest* difficulty. It will be *bitterly* opposed by the *united* Nationalists and the clergy. The present time is the worst for it since I have been in Ireland, because the cry will be: ‘England down, Ireland’s opportunity.’ Some of the difficulties would be *organised* strikes *dislocating the life of the country*, railway, post office and telegraph communications cut. There are fewer troops in Ireland than there have been for some time. More have to be taken. We would have to have additional troops for the time, at least two brigades (? *I think considerably more*). These I do not anticipate would be required for more than three months.

Ireland would have to be divided into several districts. It would be a question that will have to be considered if compulsion is put into force in the whole simultaneously, or district by district. But to render it feasible either way, the country must be put under some kind of military control. Law would have to be dropped, because ordinarily, for the first fortnight at least, there would be bloodshed and a great deal of suffering to the civil population in every way, and hardships.

The number of men we would get I cannot estimate. Ten months ago I estimated 160,000, with very liberal exemptions. It ought to be more now with increased age. I am of opinion that *some of the men when got would make good and reliable soldiers (a considerable number might be likely to give trouble). The police would have to be concentrated into larger parties, thus curtailing their usefulness. Coast watching would be interfered with, also tillage.*

I would suggest that the first thing is to get all known leaders out of the way at once; *extra troops should be on the spot simultaneously*, and everyone, irrespective of who he is, arrested on first sign of giving trouble.

These measures would be drastic, but the situation is serious, or it would not be considered necessary to have conscription at this inopportune time.”

This document showed how grave were the objections felt by those in touch with the Irish situation to the introduction of conscription. We held a second Cabinet meeting that afternoon to



discuss it further, and on the following morning, 28th March, I summoned Sir James Campbell, the Irish Lord Chief Justice, to the Cabinet, to give us his views. Sir Edward Carson, who had left the War Cabinet because of our decision to negotiate once more with the Irish Nationalist leaders for measures of Home Rule which would be acceptable to the Irish people as a whole, was also invited to be present to express his opinion.

Sir James Campbell was clear that conscription could now be enforced in Ireland only at the cost of tremendous bloodshed, and the number of men worth getting whom it would yield would be very small. This verdict was of special interest, because Campbell had been a strong advocate of conscription for Ireland. Somewhat to our surprise, Sir Edward Carson agreed with him. He said he was forced to the conclusion, with much regret, that the result of conscription in Ireland would be such that its introduction was not worth contemplating, in view of the disturbances that would be caused. If, however, the British Government found themselves unable to get men from Great Britain without enforcing conscription in Ireland, the question became a very different one.

It is almost impossible to depict the complexities in which this issue of Irish conscription was wrapped. At that time the Irish Convention was still sitting, and we were hoping that it would yield us some measure of agreement upon which we could proceed to frame and carry a Home Rule measure. For such a measure we could not hope for support from the Unionists unless they at least secured the *quid pro quo* of Irish conscription; yet we were warned that if we announced our intention of proposing such conscription, the Convention would break up at once. Some of our advisers thought the conscripts we got would be useless—Mr. Duke thought we might as well enlist Germans! The Army authorities, on the other hand, had few misgivings, and Haig thought there would be no trouble with the conscripts once he had them in France. Against the view that conscription would set Ireland ablaze was set the alternative view that removal of the young men there into the Army would cut the claws of the Sinn Fein movement. Irish conscription, especially if unaccompanied by Home Rule, would have a very damaging effect on public opinion in America. But if nothing was proposed in regard to it, I could see clearly that we could not hope to carry our Bill for raising the age limit to 50 or 55, and still further cutting down exemptions. Organised labour had intimated that it would bitterly resent the pressing through of a measure which combed out scores of thousands more of the members of Unions which had already contributed millions to the fighting forces, whilst we exempted the Irish peasantry which had done well out of the War and had given us nothing but trouble in return. After all, we were fighting for the redemption of a small Catholic country whose independence had

been crushed; and the Irish who were demanding self-government ought in return to be ready to make their contribution to this effort.

After carefully reviewing these conflicting views and considerations, we ultimately decided that we would not immediately enact Irish conscription, but we would insert in the Bill a provision authorising the Government to impose it by Order in Council. We would also, but independently, press forward with a Home Rule measure for Ireland. We felt that if such a measure could reach the Statute Book by the time we had completed our arrangements for imposing Irish conscription, the worst difficulties confronting this step would be removed.

The new Military Service Bill was introduced on 9th April. It made all men under 51 liable to compulsory military service, with power to raise that limit by Order in Council to all men under 56. And it made further provisions for cancelling exemptions and limiting the power of tribunals to grant them. As regards Ireland, it provided that:—

“His Majesty may by Order in Council extend this Act to Ireland, and this Act if so extended shall, subject to such modifications and adaptations as may be made by the Order for the purpose of making it applicable to Ireland, have effect accordingly.”

The reactions to this measure were as confused in Parliament and the country as they had been in the Cabinet. The Southern Irish members, as had been expected, violently opposed the clause, though in the Committee stage Mr. Devlin promised he would join up himself if we would bring the Irish Parliament into existence. Mr. Asquith also opposed it, though on account of the national emergency he said he would not carry his opposition into the lobby. The National Liberal Federation Executive passed a resolution urging that a Home Rule measure should be passed through both Houses of Parliament at once and come into operation simultaneously with the application of the Military Service Act to Ireland. In the Committee stage, Mr. Bonar Law promised that the Government would do their best to achieve this. In the House of Lords, both Lord Lansdowne and Lord Londonderry opposed the application of conscription to Ireland. The Bill, however, passed safely through both Houses and received the Royal Assent on 18th April.

Before attempting to apply conscription to Ireland, we decided to make one more effort to secure recruits thence on a voluntary basis. Mr. Duke put forward a scheme for inviting each district, on the model of the old Militia ballot, to furnish a quota of recruits for the Irish regiments. And we proceeded forthwith with the drafting of a Home Rule Bill. But while this was being prepared, we received information pointing to a German conspiracy to raise a fresh rebellion in Ireland, in which the Sinn Fein leaders were implicated.

Evidence of this accumulated to a point which compelled us to take the action of having those leaders arrested and interned. Therewith all hope of carrying an agreed measure of Home Rule passed for the time; and the projected introduction of conscription into Ireland was also suspended. We carried on with the scheme for regional recruiting campaigns, but without much success. From time to time we were pestered to go ahead with conscription; as near the end as 21st October, 1918, Sir Henry Wilson spent the greater part of an evening vehemently urging it upon me. But I stood firmly by the arrangement we had agreed on, that conscription and Home Rule must be introduced together. If we could not carry the second, I would not impose the first.

It is idle to speculate what would have been the result had we seriously attempted to force conscription on Ireland in 1918. That we should have had bloodshed and violent resistance there can be no doubt, nor that American opinion would have been gravely exasperated. Whether we should have secured any adequate compensation for these evils in the form of recruits is harder to say. Happily, we succeeded in winning through without being forced to resort to so desperate an expedient. As I have already indicated, our final Military Service Act did not in fact achieve any very striking increase in the numbers of recruits; apart from Ireland, no such increase was possible, for in spite of its critics the Government was already doing all that wisely could be done to supply our military effort with man-power. And the supply proved equal to the necessities of the situation. When the "Cease Fire" sounded in November, there were still more than  $3\frac{1}{2}$  millions of the manhood of this island under arms; our Navy held the mastery on water and our Mercantile Marine sailed the seven seas; our factories were turning out munitions on a scale greater than ever before, and our granaries were filled with the biggest harvest which the soil of this country had yielded for many a year. In every one of the spheres where British man-power had been called upon to make its indispensable contributions to the victory of the Allied cause, it had proved equal to its task.



## CHAPTER LXXIII

### CLEMENCEAU

CLEMENCEAU's predecessor, Painlevé, was a man of high intelligence and of considerable charm. He was a mixture of simplicity and astuteness which was attractive but perplexing. He was something of the academician in politics, and war is the most cunning of all pursuits. But if he was childlike in his ways, he was penetrating and shrewd in his judgments. He had a real insight into the heart of the problem. What he lacked was the manœuvring skill and the force necessary to convert his ideas into the action which sweeps aside obstacles, cuts through entanglements and bears down the intrigues of parliamentary and military cliques. He was too sensitive and too excitable for the position of a national leader in a bad crisis of a nation's destiny. He shrank from personal criticism with the dislike of the man who could not retort in kind. He could not have borne the shivering height of isolation in the most exalted and therefore the most exposed parliamentary position, had it not been shared, however irregularly, by a politician of a totally different type. His friend, Franklin Bouillon, became virtually his partner in the Premiership. He had none of the sensitiveness and the timidities of Painlevé. He was confident, ebullient, flamboyant. They both had courage of a high order. But Painlevé lacked assurance. Franklin Bouillon had enough and to spare for both. But it is fair to say that he was not merely aggressive—he was also dauntless and within limits, effective. He ran Painlevé. He spoke for him and over him and instead of him at interviews and consultations and conferences. At the Rapallo Conference Painlevé hardly had a look in. He managed to interject a few rapid observations, but the torrential Bouillon, under the guise of interpreting Painlevé, swept his Chief on one side and declaimed a series of speeches of his own on every topic that arose.

But a time came when Painlevé had to stand alone and speak for himself. When the murmurs of the couloirs rose into a growl and he knew he would soon have to face an assembly angry with events for which he was not responsible, but which he had failed to control, he literally cowered at the prospect. He knew that he could not dominate a gathering which great orators like Viviani and Briand had often failed to quell. When the discussion that sealed his fate was impending he literally fled to England, ostensibly on a mission to me as British Prime Minister, but in reality to enjoy a few days'

shelter from the rising storm. He spent a week-end with me at Chequers. He was uneasy, distrait and unhappy. I was sorry for him, because he was a good fellow. He knew he had done his best for his country. He was convinced that he was on the right line to save it. But he also understood that nothing would save him from the humiliation of being trampled upon as a failure by an infuriated assembly that found France preparing to face another year of war with no better prospect of victory than at the end of any other campaign. He fell, and with him, France seemed to have exhausted its waiting list of possible and seasoned Premiers. Viviani, Briand, Millerand, Ribot, Painlevé—they had all been tried and found wanting. Then came a dramatic change which had a decisive effect on the conduct of the War.

There was only one man left, and it is not too much to say that no one wanted him. The President, Poincaré disliked him. He had insulted every prominent politician in France and conciliated none. He had no party or group attached to him. He was the Ishmael of French politics. I once said of him that he loved France but hated all Frenchmen. That is a substantially fair account of his personal attitude throughout his career. He was nevertheless much the most arresting and powerful personality in the arena of French politics during the Third Republic. He was a deadly controversialist who had brought down one Minister after another, with his piercing and pertinacious sword. The men out of whom Ministries were composed he held in the utmost contempt. His scorn for them was all the more withering because it was partly justifiable and entirely genuine. He counted even Gambetta a theatrical sham, and he stripped him of the trappings of his greatness. Briand he despised as a mellifluous ranter of turgid commonplaces. Poincaré he could not abide. I never heard him speak with respect of any French politician except Jaurès, the great Socialist leader, and he was dead. Once upon a time he had crossed swords with Jaurès in a memorable debate and he had learnt to admire his intellectual quality. As for the rest, he held them all in unmitigated derision. When you asked his opinion, as I often did, of some one or other of them, he concentrated his reply either into a contemptuous ejaculation (not always publishable) or into a fierce snort. In his estimation they were just flabby and flashy Parliamentarians and nothing more. That meant he considered they were merely adepts at all the arts and crafts of the political game, either in or out of Parliament. They talked the jargon that won or held votes or *applaudissements*. They could manœuvre themselves or their groups into Ministerial offices. But they were not doers. When they got into office, the most hardworking amongst them only toiled at Minutes or despatches submitted to them by bureaucrats whose main purpose was not so much to solve a problem finally as to get it disposed of for the time being. When

they attended Conferences, these parliamentary leaders regarded it as a triumph if at the end they were able to say there was an *accord complet*, and could get an agreed *communiqué* to the Press which implied a great deal to the general public but meant nothing to the initiated. Clemenceau knew them all well—too well—and held them in utter disdain. He made no allowance for the fact that they all served to the utmost of their capacity, and even Clemenceau could do no more than that.

Clemenceau was a master of words. No orator of his day had a more perfect command and choice of word and phrase. But he was pre-eminently a man of action. His scorn was for the men who thought words a substitute for deeds and not a stimulus to deeds. He was not always fair even to the doers whom he personally disliked. I always thought him unjust to Albert Thomas, who was an organiser and worker of the first rank.

During the whole of the War, he had criticised and condemned everybody and everything. His newspaper had been suppressed. He started another. It had no circulation—except in the quarters that mattered to him. Deputies and Senators read every word of it. He made few speeches, but in Parliamentary Committees he was a terror not so much to evildoers as to those who, in my opinion, are worse in an emergency—the nondoers. For three years no one thought of him as a possible War Premier. He was a growler, and an old growler at that. He was 78 years of age. He had only just recovered from a bad operation when the War started. Shortly before he was called upon to form a Ministry, I ventured to suggest to a prominent French Deputy that Clemenceau ought to be given his chance. He scoffed at the idea. The Tiger was, in his opinion, and in that of every trotter through the couloirs of the Chamber of Deputies, clean out of the reckoning. I pointed out that shortly before the War he had held office, and turned out to be one of the strongest Prime Ministers of the Republic. My informant replied that he was no longer the man he used to be. He was now only a petulant and querulous old fellow. Then all of a sudden there came a cry from the lobbies of the Chamber of Deputies. "Why not give the Tiger a turn? If he fails, as he probably will, it will stop his snarling, and we can then try someone else, and we can silence him by an allusion to his own failure." His success was attributable to a desire for his discomfiture. These whisperings reached the ears of Poincaré and he listened to them. Hence the greatest War Ministry in the whole long succession of French Cabinets during this conflict. At 78 Clemenceau began the most notable episode in his strenuous and stormy career.

As he exerted such an influence on the course of events I should like here to give my personal impression of this remarkable man.

The first time I ever met M. Clemenceau was at Carlsbad in 1910.



I was having tea with Mr. T. P. O'Connor in his rooms. M. Clemenceau was known to be taking his annual cure, and I was anxious to meet him. T. P. arranged a meeting. Soon after I arrived there bustled into the room a short, broad-shouldered and full-chested man, with an aggressive and rather truculent countenance, illuminated by a pair of brilliant and fierce eyes set deeply under overhanging eyebrows. The size and hardness of his great head struck me. It seemed enormous, but there was no dome of benevolence, reverence, or kindliness. It was an abnormally large head with all the sympathetic qualities flattened out. I am not now analysing the man, but giving my first impressions of his appearance. He looked the part of the Tiger—the man-eating Tiger who had hunted down Ministry after Ministry, and rent them with his terrible claws. He came into the room with short, quick steps. He was then seventy years of age, and his greatest days were to come seven or eight years later.

We were introduced and he greeted me none too genially. I was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and was doing my utmost to urge an understanding with Germany on the question of naval construction. I feared war was inevitable, unless such an understanding could be reached. M. Clemenceau referred to my efforts with scornful disapproval. His hatred of Germany had a concentrated ferocity which I had never seen before, not even among the most violent of our British Germanophobes. Their hostility to Germany always seemed to be calculated and histrionic—his was of the blood. Later on I understood it better.

My first interview with M. Clemenceau was not a success. He made it clear that he thoroughly disapproved of me. Had I never seen him again, I should have recalled him as a powerful but a disagreeable and rather bad-tempered old savage. It was years—eventful years—after this meeting that I discovered his real fascination: his wit, his playfulness, the hypnotic interest of his arresting and compelling personality. And a day was to come—sooner than any one of us had anticipated—when events occurred that explained to me his apprehension of the menace as well as his detestation of the arrogance of German imperialism.

I remember driving with him back to Paris from the historic meeting at the Trianon Palace Hotel, Versailles, after he had handed to M. Brockdorff-Rantzau and the German delegates the draft of the Peace Treaty. As we passed the ruins of the palace of St. Cloud, which had been burned by the Germans in 1871, he told me how he remembered seeing the blaze. He was Mayor of Montmartre during the siege of Paris, and from the heights of his mayoral domain he witnessed the destruction of the famous château. That event seemed to have burned itself into his memory even more than the scenes of hunger and privation to which he so effectively ministered.

On this occasion he spoke with unwonted placidity about the events of 1870, rather like a man in whom the internal fires of revenge had at last been quenched by the cooling draught of victory. There is only one incident of 1871 of which he spoke to me with emotion, and that was of the poignant scene in the French Assembly when Jules Favre came straight from an interview with Bismarck to report to the deputies the nature of the terms demanded, and the ruthlessness with which the triumphant Chancellor had treated the supplication of the French delegates for some amelioration in the demands. Tears came into M. Clemenceau's eyes—for the first and only time in my intercourse with him—as he described how “the old man” (Favre), in attempting to describe the harshness of the conqueror, broke down in the tribune and wept. I then understood something of M. Clemenceau's hatred of the Germans. They had not only invaded France, defeated her armies, occupied her capital, humbled her pride, but in the hour of victory had treated her with an insolence which for 50 years had rankled in the heart of this fierce old patriot. When I met him at Carlsbad the sore was still stinging him into anger. He was essentially an angry man. Those who read his relentless words on the death of Herr Stresemann will know that not even victory had completely stamped out the embers of vengeance in the bosom of this terrible volcano of rumbling and surging hatreds—personal, national, political and religious.

That he should have succeeded as War Minister is not a matter of surprise. He possessed restless energy, indomitable courage and a gift of infecting others with his own combativeness and confidence. I know nothing of his qualities as an administrator or organiser. The greatest tasks of organisation were over before he took office at the end of 1917. A combination of energy, courage and common sense was needed at that hour, and he possessed these three attributes in an exceptional degree.

As for his courage, there is no better illustration of it than the characteristic story which is told of him when it was proposed that the French Chamber of Deputies should move to Bordeaux at the beginning of the War. The Germans were within a few miles of Paris, and President, senators and deputies thought it better to get out of range of the German guns ere it was too late. M. Clemenceau refused to go, and when he was asked whether he did not think they ought to leave Paris his answer was “Yes, we are too far from the front.”

His courage was never questioned by even his bitterest foes, but they were not as ready to acknowledge his wisdom. When he was not in a passion, or when his personal or political prejudices were not engaged—and he had his lucid intervals of composure—he took as sane, sensible, and penetrating a view of a situation as any man I ever met.

By conviction and temperament he was an inexorable cynic. He had no belief in the ultimate victory of right. His essential creed—if he had any—was that history demonstrated clearly that in the end might invariably triumphed over abstract justice. In fact, as he once put it bluntly in the course of a conversation, "Might is right." His faith was in organised and well-directed force. It was in the interest of humanity that strength should prevail over weakness. One of the most piquant passages of arms between himself and President Wilson was one in which he reminded the American idealist that the United States of America would never have come into existence without force, and that but for force it would have fallen to pieces half a century ago.

The last time I saw him as Prime Minister was after the defeat of his candidature for the Presidency of the Republic. It was for him defeat accompanied by every circumstance of humiliation, and he felt it deeply. It was the first and only occasion on which I ever saw this brave old man betray any feeling over a personal hurt to himself. He had not sought nomination. On the contrary, he had resisted up to the last moment pressure brought to bear upon him to allow his name to go forward. He did not want it. He only gave in because he was assured by many who afterwards betrayed him that it was in the interests of France that he should remain at the helm until the peace was firmly established and France had recovered from her wounds.

It was represented to him that the unique and commanding influence he had won, not only in France but throughout the world, was indispensable for some years to come. He listened to their urgings, and very reluctantly complied. He allowed his name to go forward. An intrigue largely personal but partly religious engineered a rebuff for him in the face of the whole world. A man whom he despised (and whom did he not despise?) was chosen in his place.

When I left Paris the following morning he came to the station to see me off. He did not attempt to conceal his chagrin that Frenchmen should so soon forget his services. When I said to him, "The public soon forget; it is the ultimate fate of all who serve it faithfully," he replied, "They will not do it quite like this in England."

Apropos of his defeat by M. Deschanel in the contest for the Presidency, there is a very good story told of a duel he had once fought with his successful rival. It is related that the fight took place in a garden somewhere in the suburbs of Paris. They fought with swords. M. Clemenceau was a very formidable swordsman, and as he pressed his opponent the latter retreated farther and farther from the threatening weapon. At last M. Clemenceau got tired of this continuous retreat, and, putting his sword under his arm he waved his hand, and with a bow towards M. Deschanel, he said,



"Monsieur is leaving us." Twenty-seven years later, in a different duel, it was M. Deschanel who drove the expert fencer off the ground.

M. Clemenceau was the greatest French statesman—if not the greatest Frenchman—of his day. He was in every fibre of his being a Frenchman. He had no real interest in humanity as a whole. His sole concern was for France. As long as France was humbled he cared not what other people were exalted. As long as France was victorious he did not worry in the least about the tribulations of any other country. To him France was all in all. When he began public life he found his beloved country humiliated to the dust. When he ended his career he left France the most powerful State on the Continent of Europe—largely through his exertions.

In criticism he was virulent and ferocious. He was by nature a killer. But in action he was calm, restrained and practical. He was always ready to concede or to compromise in order to get a move on. My first experience of this quality was over the Versailles Council. When he came into office his first impulse was to sweep away all the decisions arrived at by his predecessors. Amongst them was the effort to organise an Inter-Allied General Staff at Versailles to co-ordinate the war effort of the Allies on sea and land. His notion was to run the War from his office in Paris. He soon discovered that Britain, Italy and America were not disposed to take orders from the French War Office. Like all Frenchmen in the War—Generals and Ministers—he concentrated his mind exclusively on the land campaign and was inclined to say with the rest of his distinguished compatriots, "there shall be no more sea." He gradually realised the decisive importance of command of the sea. Here he saw that the British Fleet and British shipping were predominant, and that he was quite incompetent to undertake the direction of operations on the waves. Even on land, the contribution of the Allies in the aggregate outnumbered that of the French. When he came into power he had not made a real study of the war problems as a whole. His eyes were on Noyon where the Germans were entrenched not so many leagues from Paris. But he was not above learning his job. Like all great men, he was not too proud to perceive his mistakes or to alter his plans to conform with that perception. At first he was difficult and dictatorial, but he soon understood that this would not do, and after his first meeting at Versailles he realised that a new organisation which surveyed and kept itself informed, and took cognisance of all the Allied activities in every quarter and element, would be helpful to him in the discharge of his onerous duties. It was the first time he had come into contact with certain aspects of the struggle—notably those that finally decided the issue of the War, the blockade by the Allies and the efforts made to thwart the desperate but dangerous counter-blockade initiated by the enemy. He realised for

the first time how completely the Allies depended not only for their war resources but for their daily bread on our shipping, and how necessary it was to protect it and to repair its losses. It was here also that he was given the information which demonstrated how those flank attacks made elsewhere than in France were threatening the cohesion of the Central Powers, and gradually disintegrating those forces which safeguarded the Eastern and Southern frontiers of Germany whilst they menaced the British Empire on its more vulnerable but important routes.

I have many a time been asked how I personally got on with Clemenceau. There is always an expectation that the answer will reveal a cat-and-dog life led by us during our two years of close co-operation. Much of this belief is due to silly or malicious gossip. Sometimes a playful and harmless arrow sent across the table either in conversation or discussion is picked up by one man, the next passes it on with a barb attached, the third dips it in poison. Often it is the pure invention of the kind of person who likes to pass a new story or a phrase supposed to be characteristic of a prominent public man like Clemenceau when the old ones are getting rather stale. Sometimes, alas, these supposed unpleasantnesses were the creation of the spiteful fancy of men who disliked one or other or both of us. What is the real truth? I have never transacted more important business with any man than with Georges Clemenceau, and I have never met any man during the whole course of my public life with whom I more enjoyed doing business. The many opportunities I had of interchanging views with him are amongst the most delightful and treasured memories of my life. There is not an episode or a word that rankles. I came to the conclusion, at the very start of our official contact, that it was necessary to impress upon this strong-willed and overbearing old political warrior that any attempt to hector or to bully would not be tolerated, that he must treat all representations coming from the spokesmen of the British Empire with respect and that he must apply to them the best thought of his powerful mind. At an early date I chose a topic upon which there was some difference of opinion, but as to which I felt assured that we were entirely in the right. When he rather curtly and in his roughest manner tried to sweep me aside, I protested with an emphasis—perhaps a deliberate over-emphasis—which completely astonished him. He very adroitly gave in. After that his temper, which could be savage, never ruffled our intercourse.

## CHAPTER LXXIV

### THE MILITARY POSITION

#### 1. SIR DOUGLAS HAIG'S VIEWS

I HAVE already related in a previous volume how, on the occasion of one of my visits to H.Q. in France, I requested the Commander-in-Chief to submit his views on the military position which would result from the probable event of Russia being unable to maintain an active part in the War for another campaign. It was quite clear from the elaborate answers which he gave to my question, that he had only one idea in his mind, and that he had given no real consideration to any alternative plans or projects. He only considered the question of "the feasibility of overcoming the resistance of the German Armies by direct attack." That attack was to be prosecuted in the Passchendaele salient for a few more weeks, and the offensive was to be resumed in the same promising bog as soon as possible in the spring. When Gough's Army was defeated in the following spring, there was a controversy about man-power; so it is instructive to take note of the conclusion to which Sir Douglas Haig had come in October as to the probable strength of the German Army in 1918. Even if Russia "failed us to the extent of making a separate peace" his view was that it would not make such a difference to the German strength as to justify the British Army in postponing its offensive. The Germans, according to him, had already brought most of the best Divisions from Russia to the West. Most of those that were left on the Russian, Danubian and Balkan Fronts were "of low fighting value, and only 32 divisions are estimated as fit to take part in severe fighting on the Western Front." The remaining 59 divisions would probably be fully employed in watching Russia and in maintaining German influence over the armies of our Allies as at present. He calculated that the addition of the 32 more efficient divisions would give Germany a total of 179 divisions on the Western Front. But when he comes to examine the composition of all these divisions he expresses a low opinion of their quality.

"Nineteen of the German divisions now on this front are of poor quality; only fit for defensive on quiet Fronts; 135 of the remainder have already suffered heavy defeats this year, and that number will be increased in the next few weeks. Of the 179 German



divisions therefore, the value of *at least* 154 (135 + 19) must be written down considerably."

He takes a still more contemptuous view of the reserves upon which the Germans had to rely for filling up their depleted divisions. He estimates that the wastage which he had inflicted and was still inflicting on the enemy would leave at the end of the year but a small balance, *if any*, of the 500,000 men in the German reserves then available, and they were likely to commence the new year with only 500,000 to 600,000 reserves at their disposal, including the whole of the youths of 18, which, judging by his experience of the preceding class, would be of low fighting value. Haig constantly reverts to this question of the growing inferiority of the German troops.

"The German losses are being replaced now in large proportions by quite inferior material, and the proportion of such material in the German ranks will increase rapidly in the future, while by May or June, the German reserves will be exhausted."

When Haig comes to a review of the comparative equipment of the two forces he is still more hopeful and confident.

"In artillery, still more in munitions supply, and in aircraft, the Allies will have a marked superiority, and the power of increasing that superiority very greatly. In reserves of man-power the Allies, including America, have a still greater superiority."

As to the French Army, he estimates that the 100 French Divisions might be reckoned as fully equal to a corresponding number of German divisions "under the conditions explained above." Those conditions put a very low valuation on the quality of the German troops; so this assessment of the fighting value of the French Army was, to say the least, not very flattering.

The War Cabinet have been criticised because in their distribution of our man-power between the various war services which made competitive claims upon our dwindling reserves, they did not estimate the German strength at its real power; if that criticism is justifiable there was no one who was more responsible for the miscalculation of the strength of the Army the Germans could muster on the French Front in 1918 than Sir Douglas Haig himself. His considered review of the comparison of the Germans and the Allies, not only in numbers but in quality and equipment, came at a time when the Cabinet were giving a good deal of consideration to the demands for additional men made by the Fleet, by our transport services on sea and land, and by the production of coal and food supplies.

When Haig discovered his mistake it was too late for any rearrangement. The Government had by then apportioned the national

man-power. Not a single battalion could be added to the trained men available for the Western Front in the spring. We know now that even if we had been in a position to comply with every requisition which Sir Douglas Haig had made in his October paper, by withdrawing men from essential services in England, by starving the forces in other theatres, and by refusing to comply with the insistent requests of the French to take up more line, we could not have furnished him with such a superiority of numbers as would have enabled him to conduct a successful spring offensive in Flanders. He underestimated the German reserves that were available, the number of divisions that could be withdrawn from Russia, and the fighting quality of most of the German human material. He ludicrously overestimated the losses which he had succeeded in inflicting upon the German Army. Even with a great preponderance in numbers and guns he was unable to break through the German lines during the long fighting at Passchendaele. His strategic conception for 1918 was therefore based on demonstrably false premises.

The final overthrow of Russia and Roumania had now completely changed the military prospect for some months to come. The best part of the immense Army which Germany and Austria had been compelled to maintain on their Eastern Front was now free to take part in operations on the West; in France and in Italy. Until the American Army had been trained and equipped to appear on the scene of action in sufficient numbers to counterbalance the enemy reinforcement, the situation would, as far as numbers were concerned, be more or less that with which the Allies were confronted in the first year of the War before the British Army had rolled up in sufficient numbers to alter the comparative strength of the rival hosts. By mid-October, 1917, it was quite evident that the Russian Army could no longer be relied upon to do any more fighting. In these circumstances, Pétain was for maintaining a strictly defensive attitude until the Americans were ready. In his judgment they could not help in our offensives until 1919. Haig was for renewing the offensive in the spring of 1918 without waiting for them.

Thus Haig and Pétain could not agree on the appropriate strategy for the Allied forces on the Western Front, while the preparations were being made for the spring campaign of 1918. Repeated conferences took place; but they could not fix on any plan—defensive or offensive. In the summer and autumn fighting of 1917 each had gone his own way according to his own strategical notions. There was no cohesion and not much concert in their plans. One hammered at the Germans and the other pecked. The hammer was buried in the sludge. The pecking succeeded in the little it was designed to achieve. On the whole this arrangement suited the Germans.

Here is the French official story of the divergencies of opinion between the two Commanders: —

“ Marshal Haig, deep in the battle of Flanders, was absorbed in his task of the hour; at a time when neither public opinion, nor even his own army expected any further important result from the operations in progress, he continued to hope for events so decisive as to alter profoundly the same year the situation on the Western Front. In these circumstances, he was far from sharing the anxiety of the French Command over the attitude adopted by Russia. At all events he thought that the best method of remedying the collapse of this Ally was to assume a strenuous offensive on the Anglo-French Front as soon as possible.”\*

This was emphatically not Pétain's view, nor was it Foch's opinion as to the most suitable strategy for the first part of the year.

On 18th October, 1917, an interview took place between Haig and Pétain at Amiens, at which the latter laid before the British Commander-in-Chief his ideas as to the military situation and the best method of dealing with it. He adhered to the opinion he had repeatedly expressed that we could not take the risk of a definite offensive in the early part of 1918 unless Russia remained in the War and the Russian Army recovered her fighting efficiency. If that condition were not fulfilled, our efforts would have to be concentrated upon securing the best distribution for defence of the forces available on the Western Front, and on arranging that the reserves of both forces should be capable of being concentrated in support of whatever part of the front the Germans decided to attack.

But Haig still clung to his view that the offensive must be renewed by the British Army next year, and confirmed his attitude in a note he handed to Pétain at the time and in a long letter with which he followed up the interview two days later. In this letter he developed his plan and his arguments for sticking to it: —

“ G.H.Q. of the British  
Armies in the Field,  
19th October, 1917.

My dear General,

Since our interview yesterday, I have given most careful consideration to the arguments you developed and I beg leave to state my views on the question.

The fact of drafting you relief over a front of six divisions would not only diminish the importance of the troops which it would be possible for me to muster for the offensive operations

\* “ Les armées françaises dans la grande guerre,” VI.



to be undertaken next spring, but, in addition, their fitness would be impaired on account of the reduction entailed in the rest and training indispensable.

As, in addition, I am called upon to lose the valuable aid of General Anthoine's Army, my forces for the offensive would be so considerably diminished that, unless the resources at my disposal could be increased by reinforcements from other theatres of operations, an appreciable reduction in the scale of my Flanders offensive, if not its complete suspension, would result from my compliance with your request.

In my opinion, such grave consequences would result for the Allies' cause that I would call your attention to the following points:—

(a) As you are aware, due to my offensive operations this year, *the German expenditure of divisions has more than doubled our own total.\** Six of my divisions on the defensive will only have to hold a similar number of German divisions, even less perhaps.

*Employed offensively, on the contrary, these same divisions can exhaust a much greater number of the enemy's divisions of infantry—judging by this year's results, the total might amount to twelve.\** Consequently, from the point of view of the security of our defensive front, I am rendering it safer by increasing the strength of my offensive than by relieving a section of your defensive front.

*This holds good whether or not the Germans bring back a certain number of divisions from the Russian Front.\**

(b) As to the importance of maintaining the morale of your troops by the aid of offensive operations, local raids at frequent intervals, in the same way as operations of limited range, seem to me to yield excellent results from this point of view. I myself have tested this.

(c) From what you told me yesterday, you are not contemplating a large-scale offensive before the month of August, and until that date you will only carry out operations of limited scope with, consequently, only local repercussions. These operations would play a useful part in the offensive I am intending to continue in Flanders, but alone they cannot achieve any decision.

The question to which I draw your particular attention is that of knowing whether the Allies are in a position to run the risk of waiting for the month of August to try and obtain a decision. Your attention, moreover, will most certainly have been directed to the problem as to whether your reserves of available troops in the rear of your armies will be adequate for a decisive effort at this moment.

I assure you that I understand and share your difficulties. I

\* The italics are mine.

am extremely anxious to come to your assistance. Like you, I think that it is desirable for us both to reach agreement on a plan of action which we can propose to our respective Governments.

But it is incumbent upon both of us to see that the plan upon which we are agreed affords every guarantee of our being enabled to reckon on the best results. I regret I cannot share your opinion that the best use to be made of the British troops would be to extend them over defensive fronts at the expense of the offensive to which they have proved they are equal, and from the success of which such great results can in all likelihood be expected in the future.

Given the forces which will probably be at my disposal next year (from information in my possession at the moment) all that I can hope to do, with regard to the relief of your troops, would be to utilise my four divisions now on the coast, at the moment when you will take this sector, to prolong my front southwards. This relief might begin, for instance, during the last week in November.

And that, in my opinion, is not even the best strategical use which can be made of these divisions, and I believe it would be a sounder military conception if you were to relieve them again in the spring.

I consider that a prolongation of my front, carried out to the extent indicated above, would be possible next spring without compelling me to renounce my offensive in Flanders, although such an extension would still have a harmful effect. However, in order to come to your assistance and to facilitate agreement between us, I agree to this concession.

I trust that you will see fit to consent to this solution. I am simultaneously communicating with General Robertson to learn whether next spring I can hope to receive divisions issuing from other theatres of operations.\*

Yours very sincerely,  
D. HAIG,  
*Marshal."*

Once more to quote the French official narrative of the events of the autumn: —

" Marshal Haig laid down as a fundamental principle that, even if Russia made peace, the best decision would still be to pass on to the offensive with all the coalition forces. The principal attack, the important effort of the Entente, would take place in Flanders; the English Army would assume responsibility,

\* Attempts were made to fill up three British divisions in Egypt with Indian troops in order to release the white troops for France.

merely asking the Allies for their help, either directly by participating in the battle, or in carrying out operations on other parts of the front. Imbued with these ideas, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army obviously could not look with favour on the obligation to relieve a section of the French troops; however, he promised, though with manifest regret, to devote four divisions to extending his front towards the Oise, beginning from the end of November.

General Pétain sought in vain to convince Marshal Haig in the days after the Amiens Conference that existing circumstances necessitated drawing up, above all, a defensive plan; his efforts met with no success."\*

The winter was near and the time was approaching when it was indispensable that the Allies, especially on the French and Flemish Front, should come to a definite agreement as to their joint plan of campaign under entirely new conditions—the withdrawal of Russia and the growing contribution of America. The absence of the Russians would only have its full effect in the spring; the presence of the Americans could not substantially influence the military situation before the summer of 1918. By the beginning of November, 1917, Russia was practically out of the War, and the Germans acted on that assumption and concentrated their reserves on the Western Front. On the other hand, an important event had occurred which reinvigorated the indomitable spirit of France drooping from its wounds, and weary with the strain of many disappointments.

Clemenceau had become President of the Council. I have related in the previous chapter how he came to be appointed. His rise to power was of critical importance for the further conduct of the War.

\* "Les armées françaises dans la grande guerre," VI.



## CHAPTER LXXIV (*continued*)

### THE MILITARY POSITION

#### 2. PLANNING THE 1918 CAMPAIGN

TOWARDS the end of November, 1917, I went over to Paris to attend a series of Allied Conferences, called to review the whole situation. I was accompanied by Mr. Balfour and Sir William Robertson. Italy was represented by the Prime Minister, Signor Orlando, and the Foreign Minister, Baron Sonnino. America was represented by Colonel House, General Bliss and General Pershing. M. Venizelos had come over from Greece. There was a large attendance of generals and state officials from the Allied countries at the opening meeting on the 29th November, and the big room at the Quai d'Orsay was more of a General Assembly than a Council of War. M. Clemenceau presided. It was his first appearance at any War Conference and it was evident from the start that he had made up his mind to use different methods from those of his predecessors and also to let us know his intention. He disdained to follow the stately rhetoric of Ribot or the resonant oratory of Briand. He uttered two or three short snappy sentences, delivered rapidly in a high-pitched voice with an imperative accent, calling upon those present to get to work at once.

So large and promiscuous a gathering could evidently not transact business. It therefore appointed a number of Committees to consider different questions that called for detailed attention. A good deal of time was taken up with discussion of the position in Russia: that I relate in another chapter. But the real examination of the military problems confronting the Allies was reserved for a meeting of the Supreme War Council held at the Trianon Palace Hotel, Versailles, on the 1st December, over which M. Clemenceau presided. He was supported by General Foch and General Weygand. I was accompanied by Lord Milner, Sir William Robertson, and Sir Henry Wilson. General Cadorna was the military adviser of the Italian delegation and General Bliss was associated with Colonel House.

Knowing how important this meeting would be, and how it must give a direction to the whole course of military policy, I saw M. Clemenceau at the War Office in Paris, and spent much time in conferring with him as to the lead he should give as President in his opening address. I felt that his presidential address at the first meeting at Versailles of the Supreme War Council must strike a keynote

of our policy. It was a source of great satisfaction to me to find that the relentless critic of past War Ministries in France and I were in accord on general principles and agreed as to our policy for the prosecution of the War on sea as well as on land, in the East as well as in the West. What he said about the best use to which we could put our resources of man-power should be noted. British writers who praise all that Clemenceau did whilst condemning all my ideas and endeavours will be disconcerted to find that in his first official deliverance as the War Leader of France the policy he advocated was the same as that I had been consistently urging upon the Allies. I need hardly say that he was not one of those affable and pliable folk who can be persuaded into any declaration against his will because he prefers harmony to argument. Throughout the whole of his contentious career he never went out of his way either to seek concord or to shun disagreement.

In opening the proceedings he said that "the substance of his address had been agreed upon in consultation between himself and Mr. Lloyd George." The full text of this declaration of policy, which covers the whole ground of the War, is given in Appendix II to this chapter. It is worth perusing as a broad and comprehensive statement of the view then taken by the Allied leaders as to the course of the War and the action which ought to be taken to bring it to a victorious conclusion.

It had always been suggested that M. Clemenceau had been resolutely opposed to diverting any forces from the Western Front to any other flank of the enemy line. The discussions which occurred on this occasion both at Versailles and at the Paris Conferences show how thoroughly misinformed were those who claimed the new French Prime Minister as an opponent of the so-called "side-shows." M. Clemenceau in his opening speech declared that the question of the situation in Italy should be the first and the most serious consideration:—

"Of the questions to be considered, one was whether our attitude in Italy was to be purely defensive, or were we to assume the offensive. He did not consider the question of conducting an offensive should be simply left to the enemy. He proposed to circulate to the members of the Supreme War Council and the Military Advisers a Memorandum on the subject prepared by General Micheler, who had made a special study of it and who was convinced that an offensive could be effectively carried out with 28 divisions."

I have already regretted that M. Clemenceau had not been at the head of affairs during 1917. As I pointed out in the course of this discussion, I had made a similar proposal at the Rome Conference in January, 1917. I failed then even to interest the Italian Commander, and the Italian Ministers were equally indifferent to the

project. As I have related previously, the proposal was revived after the failure of the Nivelle offensive by Pétain, and subsequently by Foch. Haig had, however, already committed himself to an attack in Flanders. The idea of a great offensive in Italy was consequently put off until either he had succeeded or had assured himself that no real progress was possible in that direction. When the Passchendaele offensive stuck in August, the matter was again raised at a conference in Paris. The Italian military representative declared that it was then too late to attempt anything because of the weather. Ten weeks later the Germans launched their Caporetto offensive with calamitous results.

The way Signor Orlando received M. Clemenceau's proposal on this occasion was, to say the least, lukewarm and discouraging. The chiefs of the Italian Army and the heads of the Italian Government during the War not only never pressed for an Inter-Allied offensive on their front, but gave a chilling and a killing reception to every suggestion made by either British or French statesmen or by French generals that a joint attack should be made in Italy on the Austrian Armies by a force strengthened by British and French contingents and with the help of the heavy artillery with which Britain and France alone could equip such an offensive. This is not easy to understand. Perhaps they remembered the last occasion on which French troops had come to their assistance in 1859 and the price—Nice and Savoy—they had ultimately had to pay. In any event the failure to anticipate the disastrous Italian defeat at Caporetto by a combined Allied offensive against the Austrians must be put down to this strange refusal of the Italian General Staff. It was the second time they had shrunk from seizing the helping hand so opportunely tendered to them by their Allies.

The reason for this reluctance must be left to conjecture. The idea of an Italian offensive, even if it emanated from amateur strategists, had the support of some of the ablest soldiers on the whole battlefield. Foch, Pétain and Micheler were amongst them.

Clemenceau's proposal was referred to the Permanent Military Advisers. They were directed to study the immediate situation on the Italian Front from the standpoint not only of the defensive but of the offensive also, and to report within the next fortnight on the military possibilities of the Italian Front.

Amongst other questions to be considered was that of transport of troops and material to Italy in case of such a campaign. Personally, I felt that the proposal came too late. These measures if adopted in the previous year would have changed the whole course of events. There would have been no Chemin des Dames or Passchendaele horrors to record or repair. Neither would there have been a Caporetto nor a Russian and Roumanian collapse. The Germans would have been forced to strain their resources to the utmost to keep



the half-starved and half-mutinous Austrian Armies from falling to pieces. It might be urged that in Austrian defiles we should have had to meet the same Germans as we encountered in Flemish slime. But here the Italian Army with its overwhelming superiority in numbers would have been enabled by our superior equipment to pull its full weight. On the other hand the armies of the Central Powers, weakened by the half-hearted and discontented troops of the Slavonic Provinces of Austria, would have presented more vulnerable fronts to the persistent attacks of the Allied infantry, artillery and tanks than the homogeneous German Armies that repelled these fierce and ceaseless onslaughts in France and Flanders. One of the reasons why the Germans were not anxious to seek the help of Austrian divisions in France in 1918 was that they did not think them reliable. Although I favoured the plan strongly in 1917 I felt that now in 1918, when both Russia and Roumania were for every practical purpose out of the way and the Germans were preparing to hurl the troops released from the Eastern Front against the Allied Armies in France, it was too late to divert our forces to Italy.

Clemenceau again demonstrated his breadth of view by his attitude towards the Salonika expedition. He not only stated categorically that it could not be abandoned, he actively supported proposals for strengthening our forces on that front. The Salonika expedition was detested by the Army authorities both in France and in Britain; this hatred was displayed in a revelation which took the political leaders at the Conference completely by surprise. M. Venizelos came to Paris to place before the Conference the food position in Greece. It was extremely serious and he appealed that supplies should be instantly sent to that country in order to avert starvation. He stated that the food shortage was interfering with recruitment for the divisions of the Army which he was endeavouring to raise for the Salonika Front. He reminded us of the fact that in July he had communicated to the military authorities of the West a project for raising 12 divisions of Greek troops for Salonika, if the necessary finance were provided as well as the requisite equipment. It was a plan which would constitute a real relief to the strained man-power of France and Britain. The Allied Military Chiefs, by failing to supply the equipment required for these divisions, neglected a remarkable opportunity. They might in this fashion have increased the pressure on the southern flank of the Central Powers without diverting a single man from the reinforcement of the armies in France and Flanders. The Greek troops, when thrown into the battle line later on, had fought with great courage and skill and made even greater progress in their attack than the British and French contingents. It was the kind of country that suited them, and the climate, to which they were accustomed, did not have such injurious effects upon their physique as it unfortunately had upon men drawn from the more temperate climate of the North.

The addition of such a powerful contingent would have enabled the French and ourselves either to withdraw divisions from Salonika long before the March offensive, or to make such an attack upon the tired and disillusioned Bulgarians as would have compelled the Germans and Austrians to come to their rescue. Many of the enemy divisions which found their way to France would have thus been diverted to the Balkans. The average military mind is fearfully and wonderfully made, and where its prejudices are engaged it is not always responsible for its actions.

The conferences concluded with a general direction to the military experts of the Supreme War Council. They were directed to survey the whole position in view of the new conditions which had arisen through the collapse of Russia, and to prepare plans for submission to the Governments and to the Staffs of the Allied Armies for their consideration. It was decided to hold another meeting of the Supreme Council as soon as these proposals were made.

In order to assist the military representatives on the Council to formulate their plans, the Council passed a series of resolutions as to the furnishing of full and up-to-date information to the Council by the military authorities and by the other departments of the respective Governments.

## CHAPTER LXXIV (*continued*)

### THE MILITARY POSITION

#### 3. THE ALLIED STRATEGY FOR 1918

MEANWHILE, the question of the extension of the British Front was becoming acute.

The two Commanders-in-Chief were in contact during the month of December on the question of the plans for 1918. But the defection of the Russian Army and the steady and alarming stream of fresh German divisions towards the West does not seem to have made any impression on the stubborn and sticky mind of the British Commander. He would still attack them at Passchendaele, and attack alone without French help, and the greater their numbers the more complete their destruction. According to the French Official History:—

“during December the Commanders-in-Chief of the British and French Armies did not succeed in reaching that close and comprehensive agreement which, however, was more than ever indispensable. . . . Thus, from the outset of the initial efforts at deciding on the plan of campaign for 1918, the two Commanders-in-Chief were obliged to state that their points of view were at variance; they had been able to reach a relative agreement on a question of secondary importance—the draft of relief; they remained, on the contrary, as throughout the summer, in disagreement on the essential ideas which each judged indispensable as fundamental to the conduct of our forthcoming operations. From that time on, amid the perils threatening the immediate future of the Allied Powers, and even before the issue of the gravest difficulties which were to surge up inevitably at the moment of the enemy attack, the drawbacks of the dispersion of the command in the coalition were once more revealed.”

On the 17th December, Haig visited Pétain at the French Headquarters and discussed the relief of the French line, but—to quote again the French Official History:—

“the most essential [question] remained unsolved. At this juncture every day added to the danger of procrastination; the Allies



should have hurried for fear of being surprised before being able to reach agreement."

In conformity with the resolutions adopted by the Supreme War Council at its meeting on 1st December, 1917, and with a view to assisting the deliberations of its Permanent Military Advisers at Versailles, General Foch prepared a memorandum setting out the plan of campaign for 1918 which he recommended. As it contains in essence the strategical plan which he pursued with such success after he was made Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces in 1918, it will be interesting to set it out in full at this stage of the narrative. Had he been placed in full command of the Allied Reserves before the 21st March, the disasters of March and April would have been avoided and his plans for a counter-offensive would have fructified sooner than they did.

"From the beginning of 1918 we must expect a heavy German offensive. . . .

We shall counter it by defensive preparations, now in process of execution on both the English and French Fronts; these give grounds for optimism that the enemy offensive will be checked without having registered any decisive successes.

We shall also confront it by an attitude which, far from being passive, will involve, on the contrary, for the Entente Armies, the necessity of seizing every opportunity of imposing their will on the enemy and of resuming the offensive as soon as possible, which is the sole method of leading to victory.

With this aim in view, the Allied Armies must:—

(a) *In the event of an enemy attack*, not merely arrest and counter-attack the enemy on the very ground of their attacks, but also undertake heavy counter-offensives as a diversion on ground selected and prepared beforehand for as rapid an operation as possible;

(b) *If the enemy does not attack*, be prepared to take the initiative in operations with a limited objective, with the object of overcoming the enemy, wearing him down, and preserving the fighting spirit of the troops;

(c) *In both cases*, be capable of amplifying this action in the form of a *concerted offensive with decisive aims* if the wearing-down of the enemy or any other favourable circumstance in the situation as a whole brings such a result within reach.

These are the necessary motives underlying the action of all the Allied Armies on their several fronts.

But, in addition, in certain quarters of the front which are particularly advantageous for the enemy, their attack may assume important proportions, extend over a long period by making fresh

strides from time to time, may seek to wear down the material or moral forces of an Ally, may reopen another Battle of Verdun, a fierce long-drawn-out effort, destined to smash the nerves of a nation.

If the enemy is bent on this action, the danger of which is beyond discussion in the fourth year of war, there is only one method of compelling them to let go, of terminating this venture to undermine morale: this is for us to attack on another point of their front.

It is accordingly in action of a parallel nature, i.e., by a *counter-offensive to create a diversion* on the part of the Allied Armies, that it should be sought to *check the wearing-down offensive* engaged in by the enemy.

Yet, to be launched in time, it is imperative for such a type of counter-offensive for *diverting* purposes to have been *prepared some months ahead*.

For such a battle to offer adequate scope and significance, without remaining merely the conflict of a single Allied Army, a battle exclusively French—to free Verdun, for instance, which would not suffice—for it to occupy, in this carefully prepared action, the whole of the available Allied troops and for it to ensure concentrated, simultaneous efforts making them strive together to attain a common goal it is essential: that it should have been *devised* at the Inter-Allied Supreme War Council, the sole body competent to ensure common action, subsequently *prepared* in both British and French Armies.

This counter-offensive seeking to create a diversion, and prepared to reply to a persistent offensive on the part of the enemy would at the same time, correspond to paragraph (c).

I beg you, therefore, to request the Supreme War Council:—

1. To have a plan of action, corresponding to the views I have set forth, drawn up by both British and French Generals, Commanders-in-chief.
2. To draw up, in agreement with these same general officers, the scheme for a concerted offensive which will have to be decided with their consent, each being responsible for his relevant preparation, subject, however, to the reserve that the preparation indispensable for this counter-offensive is only to be undertaken after the fronts assigned to the several armies have been allotted in proportion to their respective troops."

This Memorandum was forwarded to the two Commanders-in-Chief as well as to the Supreme Council.

The advice given in it was by no means accepted by General

Pétain, the French Commander-in-Chief. After studying the Foch Memorandum for a week, Pétain sent to the military advisers his comments upon it, which were as follows:—

“The letter dated 1st January, 1918, addressed to the Supreme War Council, considers as eminently desirable that the offensive should be taken by the Entente Armies:—

1. Either, should the enemy attack, in the form of heavy counter-offensives for the purpose of diversion; or

2. If the enemy fails to attack, in the form of operations having limited objectives, with intent to dominate and wear out the enemy;

3. In both cases these actions ought to lead to a concerted offensive aiming at a decision.

The principle is beyond dispute.

Yet, however anxious we may be to recover the initiative for operations, we must bow to facts and draw up our forecasts, not on the basis of hypothetical data but on reality. *The American contribution is unlikely to carry weight in the battle before 1919, and until that date the Franco-British troops must be handled with such prudence as to leave the slightest possible rôle to be played by chance. . . .*”

He enters into an elaborate survey of alternatives and contingencies in order to demonstrate his theme. One of his assumptions is that the Austrians, relieved of the Russian pressure, will throw 25 of their divisions on to the French Front.\* He ends his Memorandum on a note of pessimism as to the opportunities of 1918:—

“These prospects and the precarious situation of our troops compel great prudence on our part in the use of our resources, if we want to *hold out* in 1918, without being excessively and incurably worn down, until the juncture when our American Allies are in a position to afford us substantial aid in the battle.

Undoubtedly, the nature of the German offensive may probably differ from that contemplated in the present letter. It is possible that for various reasons the enemy may attack on more confined fronts which will cost us less initially. With this assumption, several counter-offensives of retaliation or diversion are anticipated and the work of preparing the ground has been begun some time ago. But it is very important to bear in mind that these counter-offensives cannot be powerful, their performance is

\* The Austrians never sent more than five divisions to the French Front. The Germans had lost faith in Austrian troops.



bound to be local and temporary for we must look to the outcome of the operations.

Finally, if our front is attacked over an area exceeding 50 km. we shall lack even the bare minimum for resisting the attack and it will be absolutely imperative for the English to come to our aid.

In sum, the 1918 battle will be defensive from the Franco-British side, not by the express desire of the Command but by the exigency of the situation. Lack of resources also imposes it upon us. It is better to realise it at once and to organise in consequence. . . ."

As will be seen later on, Marshal Haig was now disposed to take General Pétain's view as to the impracticability of any offensive on a great scale in 1918. Up till now he had been confident that a British offensive alone might force a victorious decision. He now felt doubt as to whether even a combined Allied attack was advisable or possible.

The Foch document and Pétain's reply revealed the fact that there were serious differences not only between the Commanders-in-Chief of the two armies but between the two principal French Generals. The conflict here disclosed between the views of Pétain and Foch is fundamental. Foch insists on a single plan of action for the two armies, a simultaneous effort, and a counter-offensive in which both armies co-operate. Pétain's idea was that, if he was attacked, the English must come to his aid. Pétain also demanded that nothing should be left to chance; yet he was in fact doing so. For he could not reckon how the English, or when the English, or in what strength the English would come to his aid. He could not be sure, and was therefore leaving everything to chance—the chance that the British Commander whose primary responsibility was the safety of his own Army would, when the battle commenced, take exactly the same view as to the direction and development of the German attack as he, with his anxieties for his own Army, would take. In the event it was Haig who found himself in this situation, "a single Allied army in conflict" (to use Foch's prophetic words) not knowing how the French, or when the French, or in what strength the French would come to his aid. Furthermore, mutual aid was too vague a system. A battle is a terrible drama moving with the swiftness and confusion of a whirlpool to a climax and a decision: it leaves no time to improvise methods of help. In this deeply erroneous strategic conception lies the origin of the impending disaster. Pétain must be blamed for originating it, Haig for adopting it.

These differences rendered the task of the Versailles Military Representatives one of exceptional difficulty and delicacy. All the rival plans were reviewed and discussed by them at Versailles when

preparing their recommendations for the Supreme War Council. Their Report represented a compromise between the conflicting views, to such an extent that General Weygand on 22nd January, in a note to the Versailles Military Representatives, says:—

“To-day, under the menace and on the eve perhaps of the sternest effort which the enemy has yet attempted against us, no general plan for the 1918 coalition operations is in existence. . . .”

So perturbed was General Foch at the absence of any plan of campaign for 1918, that he felt it essential, in agreement with General Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, to call a conference of the three Commanders-in-Chief, Pétain, Haig and Pershing, in order to evolve an agreed scheme of operations to deal with a situation which was charged with danger. Foch contemplated that they should discuss all the very important problems which would shortly be submitted to the Supreme War Council: the adoption of a General Inter-Allied Reserve, the expediency of recalling troops from Italy and the transport of American troops to France. The Conference met on 24th January at Compiègne, the French Headquarters.

General Pétain opened the discussion with a re-statement of the opinions he was known to hold. The French Commander-in-Chief—

“ . . . did not conceal the fact that he believed it hardly possible for the situation of our effectives to permit us to take the offensive in 1918; in his judgment, the means of attack indispensable for its execution would be lacking as long as the co-operation of the American Army had not made itself significantly felt.”\*

Marshal Haig then expounded his views:—

“ . . . It was more than ever essential to reinforce our defensive organisations, train our reserves, prepare the process of transporting them, endeavour to be acquainted in good time with the enemy plans. Was it possible that we, in our turn, would be able to resume in 1918 the initiative for operations? *Marshal Haig refrained from expressing any very definite opinion on this point;* he contented himself with pointing out that our successful resistance might leave us so weakened as to compel us to await the expansion of the American Army before we should find ourselves in a position to obtain the decision. . . . He upheld the point of view he had formulated on 19th January: he declared his agreement with General Pétain on the need for observing a defensive attitude, as on the use of the troops and the action of the reserves; like the French Army, the English Army held in readiness three fields of action for the offensive with the power to engage five divisions on each.”

\* “Les armées françaises dans la grande guerre,” VI.

This last offensive contemplated a number of small offensives with limited aims.

The case developed by General Foch during the sitting was to a considerable extent at variance with the views of the two Commanders-in-Chief. The French Chief of General Staff in fact vigorously upheld the ideas which he had established as fundamental to the draft plan of campaign addressed in January to our Permanent Military Representative: he accordingly insisted on the necessity for executing a strenuous counter-offensive in order to check the German offensive; he said: —

*" . . . Our need is not for two separate plans, but a general plan, anticipating and preparing for the offensive action at the appropriate juncture and upon a joint scene of action of all the available Allied forces.*

*. . . In our plans, nothing is provided for the final battle, utilising all the remaining available French, British and American Allied forces."*

He accordingly demanded " not that more offensive battlefields be organised but that preparation be made for the utilisation of the Allied troops which at a given moment will remain available. . . . "

The two Commanders-in-Chief replied to General Foch's arguments by again describing the poverty of their effectives *which left very feeble hope of the Anglo-French Armies being in a position to take a vigorous offensive during the forthcoming battle.*

Here again are two schools of thought. As Foch said, what was required was one plan for the two armies, not each army with its own plan. Haig and Pétain kept up their lamentations about the poverty of their effectives. All is relative. The effectives of each army standing alone might seem poor next to the German. The united effectives of the two Allied Armies were still richer, and at the climax of the German strength were equal in numbers and more powerful in machinery than the German. But Pétain and Haig were determined to fight the Germans with separate armies, operating separately, as the Allies had so obligingly done for three years. Motives can only be conjectured: but probably the objection of each to a single plan lay in this—it would have diminished his authority over his army. Hence their obstinacy, which only a catastrophe broke down.

Pershing's chief contribution to the discussion was his insistence on the proposition that: —

*" . . . on the day when an offensive action is required of the American troops, the American Army will have to be autonomous."*

At the Conference of Compiègne the high military authorities had



again failed to reach an agreement on the important questions of the Allied campaign for 1918. True, the two Commanders-in-Chief professed that they were now agreed on their plan of campaign. They claimed that they had even begun to prepare to execute it; the emergence of the Supreme Council's plan of an Inter-Allied Reserve under independent direction had forced Pétain and Haig on to a common front—not against the Germans, but in opposition to the Versailles. In effect, however, their views were at variance not only with the proposals made by General Foch with regard to the Western Front, and with the suggestions submitted by the Permanent Military Representatives to the Allied Governments, but also in some important respects with each other. It was still more significant that the Conference had not broached the question, capital as it was, of the single command, even in such an attenuated form as the constitution of a General Inter-Allied Reserve.

In the days following the Conference of Compiègne Marshal Haig and General Pétain did not conceal the repugnance they felt for the scheme for an Inter-Allied Reserve forwarded to them for consideration. On 27th January, General Pétain declared to General Foch that he regarded the reserves now stationed behind the Franco-British Front as barely adequate "to safeguard the liberty of manœuvre of the Franco-British High Command in the initial stages of the defensive battle." In his opinion, the General Reserve could only be levied from the Allied forces in Italy; in such case, it seemed advisable that it should include four Italian divisions retained on the plain of the Po and four French and English divisions respectively which would be recalled from Italy to France.

The result of the Compiègne Conference was eminently unsatisfactory in that it revealed a fundamental difference of opinion between Generals who had within a few weeks to face the most formidable attack launched on their front since the first German attack in 1914. General Weygand's solution was the appointment of a Generalissimo of the Allied forces. Complete unity of command under one general would no doubt have been the simplest, most direct, and much the most effective method of establishing strategic unity. It was obviously the appropriate remedy for the weaknesses of a divided command from which the Allies had suffered such damage. Why then was not the proposal of the French Military Representatives agreed to by the other Military Representatives? Neither Henry Wilson nor General Cadorna accepted the suggestion. Not only was it not adopted—it had not the slightest chance of being adopted at that moment. There were national prejudices, political susceptibilities and personal jealousies to overcome. One can understand the dislike which one great nation would have of placing its finest army under the command of another—and not a greater—nation. It was easier for the French to advance and support the idea

than for British Generals or Ministers. But even they had political susceptibilities which hindered that desirable solution of Allied difficulties. Foch was never an acceptable military chieftain for the ardent Republicans who have governed France for at least a generation. And the personal rivalries which intervened were just as intense on the French side as on ours. Haig was convinced that he was a better practical soldier than Foch, and Pétain thought himself a safer general with an equal, if not superior, record of success. A worse element was the rivalry of the various staffs. If Foch were made Generalissimo, the whole status of the two G.H.Q.'s was lowered to second place. It is sad to think that these little human frailties should influence men in great issues. But no profession is free from them and experience makes me think that members of the military profession are no more immune from propensities that disturb the balance of judgment than those who are engaged in other honourable avocations. Clemenceau at that date would not have placed Foch above Pétain for reasons I give elsewhere. Neither Orlando nor I could at that time have agreed to making Foch Generalissimo without encountering formidable opposition in the Senate and the Services, and without facing a risk of repudiation at home which would have had a chilling effect on our relations with the French Army and the French people. The next best thing was to unify the general reserves and place them under a single direction. This was a subtle solution of the difficulty. We avoided the drawbacks and obtained the advantages of a Generalissimo. Each Commander-in-Chief would retain his full authority unimpaired: thus the objection to a Generalissimo was avoided. When an offensive on a great scale is anticipated the preparations made by the enemy behind their lines give a general indication of the quarter where the blow is likely to fall. But it is not possible to define its limits or the point where the enemy is likely to concentrate his greatest strength. The result is that it is not easy to determine the exact spot where the reserves should be placed in order to reach the battlefield in the shortest time. That is why in every attack, whether made by the Allies or by the Germans, the assaults have generally had overwhelming numbers for the first day or two. At Neuve Chapelle the British had a superiority of ten to one. On the first day of the Somme we had six to one. When the Vimy Ridge was carried, we had at least three to one. In the battle of the 21st March the Germans had three to one on the Fifth Army Front and two to one against the Third Army. That is why the first assault generally succeeds. The best a defending General can do is to arrange his reserves behind the threatened area in such a way as to be available to be thrown in at the weakest point with the least possible delay. That was the reason that compelled Foch and the Versailles representatives to recommend the formation of a large General Reserve which could be placed in the vicinity of

the threatened sector as soon as it became clear where the Germans were massing their forces. Upon this eminently practical and sensible project the Versailles Staff concentrated, and they embodied it in the recommendations they submitted to the Council in two remarkable memoranda known as Notes 12 and 14. (As Joint Note No. 12 contains a comprehensive but compendious review of the whole position, and formed the basis of discussions which had momentous results, I have thought it desirable that this document should be given textually in Appendix I to this chapter.)

The proposals contained in these two Notes were governed by the consideration that:—

“The Allies were confronted with a fundamental, if not permanent change in the conditions upon which their strategy had to be based, as compared with the conditions, existing or anticipated, as long as the Russian Armies kept the field.”

They contemplated a heavy attack by the Germans on the Allied positions in France in the early spring, an attack which might possibly, in their opinion, attain a strength of 96 Divisions, exclusive of *roulement*. They considered that the first and foremost task of the Allies was to organise their resources to resist this impending German attack. In order to make the position secure in France it was necessary that the Allied forces should be continuously maintained at the strength which they possessed at that date, and that they should also receive “the expected reinforcement of not less than two American divisions a month.” That meant that France and Britain should make an effort to maintain during the struggle their numbers at the figure they amounted to at that moment. They also regarded it as a necessary condition of security that there should be a substantial progressive increase in the mechanical strength of the Allied Armies; in guns, in machine-guns, in aeroplanes, and in tanks. They attached importance to strengthening and co-ordinating the Allies’ system of defences, “*more particularly in the sectors most liable to heavy attack.*” Their last and most important recommendation is one which they developed in a separate paper:—

“That the whole Allied forces in France should be treated as a single strategic field of action, and that the disposition of the reserves, the periodic rearrangement of the point of junction between the various Allied forces, and the actual front, and all other arrangements, should be dominated by this consideration.”

To those of us who had been labouring hard to secure strategic unity, this last recommendation seemed to be far and away the most fruitful suggestion in the whole document. That the Allies failed for three years to break through the German line in spite of a 50 per cent. superiority, was largely if not mainly due to the fact that the



Germans possessed the incalculable advantage of a United Command, and could, without negotiations between Commanders and Governments representing completely independent armies on the same front, distribute and redistribute the forces according to the exigencies of the situation. That was worth more to them than a mere numerical equality which a large contingent of Austrians on the same front would have given them.

It was for this reason that I attached more importance to the recommendation as to the General Reserve than to any other part of the Versailles Staff document. No possible withdrawal of troops from Russia could give the German Army even a temporary and evanescent numerical superiority on the Western Front in 1918 of more than 5 per cent. That slight advantage, if it were attained, would disappear in the late spring when the Americans had rolled up, and from the start it would be far more than countered by the unquestionable superiority of the Allies in guns, ammunition, machine-guns, tanks, aeroplanes, and above all, in transport. When they came to consider whether there would be any opportunity in the course of 1918 of securing in the main Western theatres a final or even a far-reaching decision against the enemy, they accepted a prognosis of Pétain: —

“... If the enemy cannot gain a final decision against the Allies the question arises whether there is any opportunity in the course of 1918 for the Allies to secure, in the main Western theatres, a final, or even a far-reaching decision, against the enemy? The Military Representatives are of the opinion that, *apart from such measure of success as is implied in the failure of the enemy's offensive, or may be attained by local counter-strokes, and leaving out of account such improbable and unforeseeable contingencies as the internal collapse of the Enemy Powers, or the revival of Russia as a serious military factor*, no such decision is likely to be secured during the fighting period of 1918. Neither the addition of the American troops in view during this period, nor such reinforcements as could be secured for any one of the main theatres by withdrawing from the secondary theatres any margin of troops that may be available above the necessities of local defence, would make a sufficient difference in the relative position of the opposing forces to justify the hope of attaining such a decision.”

In the following concluding sentences they seemed to veer to the Foch thesis of the possibility of a general offensive with a view to reaching a decision: —

“This should not prevent the Allied General Staffs closely watching the situation in case an unexpected favourable development should furnish an opportunity for vigorous offensive actions for which they should always be prepared. In any case the

defensive on the Western Front should not be of merely a passive character, but be worked out definitely and scientifically, with the intention of gaining the maximum advantage from any opportunities offered in this theatre."

The consideration of the nature of the measures that should be envisaged for defence, as well as for taking advantage of any opportunity that might offer, was dealt with in another paper. This outlined a proposal of a General Reserve under a central authority to meet any emergency or take advantage of any opportunity that might arise. To form this Reserve the French, British and Italian Armies were each to make their contribution.

These measures excluded the possibility of achieving any far-reaching decision in the Balkans. Owing to "the strength and comparative homogeneity of the numerous forces against them," the experts thought it possible that in this theatre the Allied forces might find themselves heavily attacked and might be compelled to give ground. To provide against this eventuality, they suggested that adequate preparations should be made in time for the occupation of shorter and stronger lines, covering the mainland of Greece and if possible, Salonika.

It is stated by the British Official History, that at the Compiègne Conference, Sir Douglas Haig proposed that the whole of the British and French troops should be withdrawn from Salonika and brought to France. He may have done so in the course of the interchange of ideas. It fits in with his obsession that all the men and all the guns and all the ships must be given to him for his front. The proposal, if adopted, would have laid open the whole of Greece, with its convenient ports for submarines, to the unresisted occupation of the Central Powers. Without a struggle they would have secured a number of submarine bases at the most vulnerable points of the pathway to Egypt and our Eastern Empire. The Mediterranean would have been practically closed to our shipping. Constantine was an instrument ready to their hand to be used for any purpose for which he could have pleaded the slightest appearance of duress. He had already voluntarily handed over two Greek divisions to the Germans. Had we taken away all our troops from the Balkans, he would have placed the whole Greek Army at the disposal of the Powers with whom lay his real sympathies. The Bulgarian Army, released from the presence of a formidable enemy force south of the Balkans, could have spared a few divisions to help one or other of their Northern allies or to support the hard-driven Turkish Army to check the British advance in Palestine. This acknowledged and accepted defeat in the Balkans would have adversely changed the whole situation in the East without giving us a greater superiority of numbers in the West than the British Army possessed in its Flanders campaign.

Haig's suggestion was so patently fatuous that it received no encouragement from any other soldier, British, French or Italian, and consequently never appeared at the Conference table. Neither Sir Douglas Haig nor Sir William Robertson ever hinted to the Cabinet that they harboured such a thought. I would never have heard of it had it not appeared in the Official History.

The Military Members at Versailles, after dealing with the Western Front and Salonika, urged strongly that an effort be made to: —

“ . . . inflict such a crushing series of defeats upon the Turkish Armies as would lead to the final collapse of Turkey and her elimination from the War would not only have the most far-reaching results upon the general military situation, but might also, if not too long deferred, be in time to enable the Allies to get into direct touch with, and give effective help to, such elements of resistance to German domination as may still exist in Roumania and Southern Russia.”

In order to achieve this end they did not contemplate the withdrawal of any units or reinforcements from the West. They considered: —

“ . . . that the existing Allied forces in Palestine and Mesopotamia are already sufficiently superior to the enemy in numbers, equipment and morale to justify the hope that successful operations can be carried out with these forces providing they are maintained at full strength. They would also strongly urge that any additional minor reinforcements such as could be provided by the *termination* of the East African operations, by the raising of new units in India or in the French possessions, by the transfer of superfluous mounted troops from the Western theatre, or possibly at a later date, by the transfer of one or two Divisions from Salonika, if the enemy make no serious offensive in the Balkans, and the organisation of the Greek Army makes sufficient progress to enable it to be relied upon to replace the Divisions sent away, should be concentrated in the Turkish theatre.”

As to the Italian Front, the main recommendations were directed towards the reorganisation of the Italian Army. The proposal put forward by M. Clemenceau at the first meeting of the Supreme Council for a joint Allied offensive on a great scale on the Italian Front was not encouraged. It was generally felt to be too late to consider such a project when the German clans were gathering from east and south for an immense onslaught on the Allies in France. Actually, Note 12 was signed by the Allied Military Representatives on the day that Ludendorff finally decided that his first great attack should be made on the British Front at the earliest moment at which it was possible to stage so gigantic an operation.



## CHAPTER LXXIV (*continued*)

### THE MILITARY POSITION

#### 4. THE MEETING OF THE ALLIED SUPREME COUNCIL

THE meeting of the Supreme Council to consider the military situation and to examine the recommendations of the military advisers was held on the 30th January and lasted for four days. Its principal business was to come to a decision on the measures already proposed and thus to secure a united front for this critical year. The foremost of these measures was the scheme worked out for setting up an independent General Reserve. Rumours had reached me that both Commanders-in-Chief were angrily opposed to the proposal. They disliked the idea itself, they disliked even more the notion of having their strategic plans subordinated to the arbitrament of General Foch. When Milner and I reached Versailles and heard the gossip of the G.H.Q.'s we expected a rough passage for the General Reserve propositions.

The Assembly at the Trianon Palace Hotel was a notable one not merely for the importance of its theme, but for the representative character of those who attended it and took part in its discussions. Clemenceau, in the chair, was surrounded by an array of important Ministers from all the Allied countries. The Commanders-in-Chief (Marshal Haig and General Pétain) and the Chiefs of the Staff of France and Britain, General Foch and Sir William Robertson, were present. The Italian and Belgian Armies were also represented, as were the Allied Navies. The Military Representatives of the Supreme Council were present. America was represented by General Bliss. No one could challenge the authoritative character of the gathering. It was thoroughly representative not only of the Allied Governments, but of the military and naval services of the Allies.

Before we came to an examination of the proposal for setting up a General Reserve, there was a general discussion on the position in the West. There is nothing that strikes one more in perusing the notes taken of that discussion, and the memoranda furnished by the Allied General Staff, than the extent to which all our military advisers overestimated the strength of the enemy and thus understated the possibilities of the 1918 campaign. General Foch was the only exception to the general pessimism of the rest, probably because he took a general view and did not exclude from his mind everything

but his own particular front. There were decisive factors of which either they were completely ignorant or which they chose to ignore. They were either not informed about, or did not appreciate the effect of the serious food and fuel shortage on the enemy side. It ultimately precipitated the collapse of the Central Powers by destroying the morale and mobility of their armies, by weakening the spirit and the will of the nations behind the army, and it also deprived both the Austrians and the Germans of the full benefit of the Russian Peace, for it compelled them to maintain large forces in Russia in order to exploit its food reserves. There was also an incomprehensible agreement amongst all the military chiefs that the American contribution would have no appreciable effect upon the campaign of 1918. Sir Douglas Haig was doubtful whether they could allow in 1918 "for the addition of American units of a total strength equivalent to eight divisions." And he added:—

"As regards the American forces, our own experience had been that our new divisions required nine months' home training and six months' training in France, before they were fit for hard fighting, though they could be put into quiet sections of the line before that. Nor could we expect that the American divisions could be placed in the line together in any number without inviting a heavy German attack. He *consequently did not consider the Allies could expect the American force, as a force, to be of effective support this year.*"

He therefore stated that he had come to the conclusion that:—

"A large offensive such as had been indicated by General Foch, was not, in his opinion, practicable."

In fact, he took such a depressing view of the prospects that:—

"he considered that if the enemy attacked in force the situation would be very serious by the autumn."

This indeed was a come-down from the exalted altitudes in which he dwelt in October, 1917. He then thought that the German Army was so demoralised, that its fighting value was so deteriorated, and that its reserves had been so completely destroyed, that if we furnished the British Army with reinforcements (which we did not fail to do, for we created mechanically powerful new units), his army alone could conduct a triumphant offensive against them so long as the French just held their line with an occasional disquieting push to prove that they were still alive and present. There is no way of explaining why this second and contrary idea should displace his first and previous idea, except by supposing that in neither case was there any clear or accurate thinking. There was no change in circumstances. For in his first plan he had fully reckoned on the withdrawal

of the picked German divisions from the Russian Front and discounted its effect.

Sir William Robertson was of the same opinion as to the impracticability of a great offensive operation in 1918 and said that General Foch "had proposed an offensive on a bigger scale than he thought possible." General Pétain was of the same opinion, and said: —

"As regards the American Army, he agreed entirely with the conclusions arrived at by Sir Douglas Haig. In fact, in his opinion, the American Army, if it wished to retain its autonomy, would be of no use to the Allies in 1918, except perhaps along some quiet section of the front."

We all know how completely these pessimistic estimates of the American contribution were falsified by the event.

Then we arrived at our decision as to the General Reserve. Let this be noted carefully at this stage: for a few weeks later the facts going to become important. Sir William Robertson, Sir Douglas Haig and General Pétain were present during the whole of the proceedings and took part in the discussions, and accepted the resolutions which were ultimately agreed to. There was no dissentient voice from any quarter when the final proposals were put to the meeting. M. Clemenceau opened the proceedings by propounding four questions: —

" ' Shall we constitute a General Reserve? ' "

' Will it be a Reserve for the whole front from the North Sea to the Adriatic? ' "

' How shall it be disposed? ' "

' Who will command it? ' "

GENERAL FOCH said that, in the existing condition of our front, we had to defend a line from Nieuport to Venice without knowing where the enemy was concentrating or where or when the attacks would be made. In this situation it was difficult to envisage completely the question of reserves. Nevertheless, the necessity of having a Reserve was absolutely indisputable. Moreover, there was no doubt that the reserves should be constituted for the whole front from the North Sea to the Adriatic, and consequently it should be drawn from the British, French and Italian Armies. This Reserve must be additional to the divisions which each army has behind its own front. It was also necessary to have some authority to conserve the reserves and to decide when the time has come to use them, to arrange for their transport to the north or south, and to decide all details in conjunction with the commanders of the armies to whom they might be sent. To summarise,



there must be one authority, able to constitute, conserve, and prepare for the employment of the General Reserve by the various armies, in agreement with the commanders. When the moment arrives to make use of the Reserve the same authority must decide on their use, must arrange for their transport, and feed the battle-line in which the Reserve might be utilised. As the Reserve might be utilised to support any of the Allies, the central authority must be Inter-Allied in character. *It must be able and entitled to make all the necessary preparations.* Moreover, this Inter-Allied organ must be required to take decisions if the Governments were not in session at Versailles. *In fact, it must be an Inter-Ally organ of execution.* The only question that arises is as to how this central authority should be constituted. If he were asked for a concrete proposal he would suggest to bring together the Chiefs of the Staff who advise their Governments on the different questions, in order that they might carry out their duties in agreement. To these principal members of the central organ there should be added representatives of the American Army and of the Belgian Army."

Serious discussions were to arise later when the time came for the execution of the resolutions. The Reply made by Sir William Robertson to General Foch's speech should therefore be read with the greatest attention.

"GENERAL ROBERTSON said that *he was in general agreement with General Foch in regard to the necessity of creating a General Reserve.* The fundamental question, however, was the command of the Reserves. If this were settled, the composition of the Reserves would settle itself. *He himself doubted the need of the General Reserve at the moment,* because most of the Allied troops were needed where they were, except in Italy. *Any day, however, it might be necessary to form the proposed Reserve, and therefore the question of the organisation should be studied in detail.* He agreed with General Foch that the best persons to control the Reserve would be the Chiefs of the Staff. This arrangement would perfectly well suit Great Britain and France, but it would not suit Italy as well, as the Italians had no Chief of the Staff, except with the Commander-in-Chief of the army. He also understood that General Pershing commanded all the American troops in France. The questions of the Italian and American representation would want working out in detail, but these minor difficulties could be surmounted. *Whoever commands the Reserve must be in a position to issue orders immediately the emergency arises.*"

This sentence emphatically expresses Sir William Robertson's opinion. He insists on the importance of confining authority over the disposal of the Reserves to men on the spot. This should be

noted because there was subsequently a great controversy on this point.

"The central controlling body, however, should interfere as little as possible with the Commanders-in-Chief, who were responsible to their respective Governments. What the central body had to do was to perform those duties which could not be undertaken by the Commander-in-Chief of any one of the fronts."

What Sir William Robertson states must be remarked. He says he is in general agreement with Foch on the necessity of creating a General Reserve for an emergency. He also approves the idea of a composite reserve with an independent controlling board and his only doubt is as to the time when it ought to be brought into existence. As to the composition of the controlling authority, he is insistent that so far as France and Britain are concerned, the Chiefs of the Staff would be the best choice.

Throughout the discussion it was made quite clear that this General Reserve, whilst acting in consultation with the Commanders-in-Chief, should be independent of them as far as the allocation of the troops constituting the forces of the General Reserve was concerned. There was therefore no question of principle raised either by Robertson, Pétain or Haig in opposition to the idea of an independent General Reserve. M. Clemenceau put it with his usual clarity and force when he said: —

"... At the moment he did not want to discuss the question, but merely to know what was intended. . . . He understood that each General would have a reserve of his own; for example, there would be French, British, Italian and American reserves. In this scheme he did not see how the great army of reserves which he wanted was to be created. He did not want to discuss the question for the moment from a military point of view, but merely from one of common sense. If each General had the free disposition of his own reserves what would happen? When one General was attacked he would gradually use up his reserves until there was none left. In the meanwhile, the General commanding the adjacent army might have the whole of his reserves in hand. Hence a situation of great danger might arise. When the question of creating an Inter-Allied Reserve had been raised it had been with the idea that, as we could not have a single Commander-in-Chief, such as a Hannibal or a Charlemagne, we might at least have a Commander of Reserves. *He considered it very desirable that we should build up an Army Reserve which could be sent to any point where it would be useful.*"

Generals Cadorna, Pétain and Bliss showed clearly that they were thoroughly cognisant of the nature of the transaction. An answer

given by General Pétain to a question put by Signor Orlando makes this clear: —

“SIGNOR ORLANDO suggested that when General Pétain talked of the reserves being disposed of by the new central body he understood that this did not apply to the reserves at the disposal of particular armies. He understood that each army would continue to have its own reserves in addition to those under the Inter-Allied central body.

GENERAL PÉTAIN replied in the affirmative. The idea was to constitute an Inter-Allied Reserve in addition to the local reserves of the armies.”

The principle of a separated and independent General Reserve having been generally accepted, and it having been made abundantly clear that it should not be under the control of the Commanders-in-Chief, but of a central body to be constituted, the Council then proceeded to consider its composition and the constitution of the body which should control it.

Ultimately the following resolution was adopted unanimously: —

1. The Supreme War Council decided on the creation of a General Reserve for the whole of the armies on the Western, Italian and Balkan Fronts.

2. The Supreme War Council delegates to an Executive composed of the Permanent Military Representatives of Great Britain, Italy and the United States of America, with General Foch for France, the following powers to be exercised in consultation with the Commanders-in-Chief of the armies concerned: —

(a) To determine the strength in all arms and composition of the General Reserve, and the contribution of each national army thereto.

(b) To select the localities in which the General Reserve is normally to be stationed.

(c) To make arrangements for the transportation and concentration of the General Reserve in the different areas.

(d) To decide and issue orders as to the time, place and period of employment of the General Reserve; the orders of the Executive Committee for the movement of the General Reserve shall be transmitted in the manner and by the persons who shall be designated by the Supreme War Council for that purpose in each particular case.

(e) To determine the time, place and strength of the counter-offensive, and then to hand over to one or more of the Commanders-in-Chief the necessary troops for the operation. The moment this movement of the General Reserve, or any part of it, shall have begun, it will come under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, to whose assistance it is consigned.



(f) Until the movement of the General Reserve begins, it will, for all purposes of discipline, instruction and administration, be under the orders of the respective Commanders-in-Chief, but no movement can be ordered except by the Executive Committee.

3. In case of irreconcilable differences of opinion on a point of importance connected with the General Reserve, any Military Representative has the right to appeal to the Supreme War Council.

4. In order to facilitate its decisions the Executive Committee has the right to visit any theatre of war.

5. The Supreme War Council will nominate the President of the Executive Committee from among the members of the Committee.

I proposed that the new body should have a President and that that President should be General Foch. I stated my reasons thus:—

“He (MR. LLOYD GEORGE) thought it very desirable that as the proposed Committee was to have executive powers it should have a President. Some members of the Supreme War Council desired to insert the name of the President in the text which constitutes the body, but his own view was that it was best not to insert the name. It was preferable that the Supreme War Council should nominate the President. The President of the Committee must necessarily have special qualifications, and the members of the Supreme War Council had agreed—that is to say, the three heads of Governments attending that meeting had agreed, and in the absence of the President of the United States had ventured to assume the latter's concurrence—that the right man to be President was General Foch, on account of his experience, his record and his energy, his great military gifts and his reputation.

GENERAL BLISS said he was sure that the three Prime Ministers were right in assuming that President Wilson would acquiesce in this suggestion.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE went on to give the reasons why he and his colleagues had come to this decision. General Foch was loyal not only to France, but also to the Allies. When the British Army in Flanders was in difficulties he threw all his weight into rendering it assistance. So prompt and generous was that assistance that General Foch might almost have been an Englishman himself. Again when Italy was in trouble General Foch, without any hesitation and on his own responsibility, decided to send troops to her aid. General Foch therefore commanded the confidence not only of the French but also of the British and Italians, and he was glad

to hear, the Americans. They could be quite sure that as President of the Committee, General Foch would be quite unbiased. He had, therefore, great pleasure in announcing this decision of the Supreme War Council."

I had already put the suggestion before M. Clemenceau and Signor Orlando at a private conference, and made the proposal with their concurrence.

The military policy formulated by the Versailles Inter-Allied Staff was thus the one ultimately adopted by the Council and accepted by the Allies. Its principles were:—

1. The organisation of the whole of the forces of the Allies for defence against the German attack on the basis of a united front. To achieve this aim, power to be given to a Central Authority to form and direct a General Reserve available for use at any part of the front where that Authority deemed it advisable to throw them in for defence or counter-attack. The Council appointed General Foch President of an Inter-Allied body of Generals who constituted the authority in control of the General Reserve. In the West, Foch was ultimately given the sole command of the Allied Armies. That was undoubtedly an improvement on the original plan. But he was so easily the dominant personality on the Board that in effect the scheme would have given him supreme direction of the Allied strategy in the West.

2. To watch the situation in case an unexpectedly favourable development should furnish an opportunity for vigorous offensive action. The defensive was "not to be of a merely passive character, but to be worked out definitely and scientifically, with the intention of gaining the maximum advantage from any opportunities offered in the Western theatre." Foch was the only General who was confident that opportunities of this kind might arise in 1918.

The Versailles discussion ended in complete accord between all the statesmen and Generals of the Allies as to the plan of campaign to be pursued by the Allied Armies on all fronts during the year 1918.

I have no recollection of any dissent being expressed by anyone when the resolutions, ultimately adopted, were put to the meeting, and there is no record of any protest from any quarter.

There was a very free discussion, and statesmen and Generals expressed their minds very fully. But neither at the time that the resolution was put to the meeting, nor after it dispersed, did the Government receive any notification from any of the Generals that they disapproved of the conclusions at which the Council had arrived.

## APPENDIX I

### NOTE 12

THE Military Representatives have the honour to inform you that at their Meeting held on 21st January, 1918, they passed the following Resolutions: —

1. In submitting to the Supreme War Council their advice on the military action to be undertaken during 1918, the Military Representatives think it necessary to place before the Supreme War Council in the briefest possible manner the grounds on which their advice is based.

2. Looking out over all the theatres of war they examined the state of affairs both in the main theatres and in the secondary theatres, first of all from the point of view of the security of the fronts in those theatres, and then from the point of view of the opportunity which may present themselves for gaining a decisive or, at any rate, far-reaching success in any of those theatres.

3. It was assumed that the United Kingdom was safe from all serious invasion and that the necessary measures, both naval, military and air for its defence against the contingency of an attack, involved no interference with the operations of the British force overseas.

4. It was agreed, after the most careful and exhaustive examination, that the safety of France could also be assured. But in view of the weight of attack which the enemy can bring to bear upon this front, an attack *which may possibly, in the opinion of the Military Representatives, attain a strength of 96 Divisions, exclusive of "roulement,"* they feel obliged to add that France will be safe during 1918 *only* under certain conditions, viz.: —

(a) That the French and British forces in France are continuously maintained at their present total aggregate strength, and receive the expected reinforcement of not less than two American Divisions a month.

(b) That there shall be a substantial progressive increase in the total Allied equipment in guns of all calibres, in machine-guns, in aeroplanes and in tanks, with the personnel necessary



to man them, and the most effective co-ordinated employment of those and all other mechanical devices.

(c) That every possible measure shall be taken for strengthening and co-ordinating the Allied system of defences, more particularly in the sectors most liable to a heavy attack.

(d) That the rail transportation be improved and co-ordinated.

(e) That the whole Allied Front in France be treated as a single strategic field of action, and that the disposition of the reserves, the periodic rearrangement of the point of junction between the various Allied forces on the actual front, and all other arrangements should be dominated by this consideration.

5. It was agreed that Italy was safe, but again under certain conditions, viz.: —

(i) That the Italian Army be reformed, trained and re-equipped with artillery before 1st May, and that several positions in rear of the present line be constructed on modern principles.

(ii) That the power of rapid rail transport be increased both in the interior of Italy itself, and between Italy and France in order to secure strategic unity of action over the two theatres.

(iii) That, in addition to the necessary measures taken against pacifism by the Italian Government itself, the Allies should assist Italy by the provision of coal, wheat and other necessities as well as financially, in order to prevent the creation of economic conditions which would diminish the strength of the interior resistance of the country.

6. If the assumptions in paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 are accepted then we have got this far in our examination of the problem viz.: that the enemy cannot in 1918 gain a definite military decision in the main theatres which would enable him to break finally the resistance of any of the Allied Powers.

7. If the enemy cannot gain a final decision against the Allies the question arises whether there is any opportunity in the course of 1918 for the Allies to secure, in the main Western theatres, a final, or even a far-reaching, decision against the enemy? The Military Representatives are of the opinion that, apart from such a measure of success as is implied in the failure of the enemy's offensive, or may be attained by local counter-strokes, and leaving out of account such improbable and unforeseeable contingencies as the internal collapse of the Enemy Powers, or the revival of Russia as a serious military factor, no such decision is likely to be secured during the fighting period of 1918. Neither the addition of the

American troops in view during this period, nor such reinforcements as could be secured for any one of the main theatres by withdrawing from the secondary theatres any margin of troops that may be available above the necessities of local defence, would make a sufficient difference in the relative position of the opposing forces to justify the hope of attaining such a decision. This should not prevent the Allied General Staffs closely watching the situation in case an unexpected favourable development should furnish an opportunity for vigorous offensive actions for which they should always be prepared. In any case the defensive on the Western Front should not be of merely a passive character, but be worked out definitely and scientifically, with the intention of gaining the maximum advantage from any opportunities offered in this theatre. A detailed consideration of the nature of the measures that should be envisaged is given in a paper which is appended as an annexe to this Note.

8. The Allies are therefore confronted with a fundamental, though not permanent, change in the conditions upon which their strategy has to be based, as compared with the conditions, existing or anticipated, as long as the Russian Armies kept the field. They are accordingly obliged to consider how that strategy must be modified in order to take the fullest advantage out of such opportunities as remain open to them during the phase of deadlock on the Western Fronts. In other words, pending such a change in the balance of forces as we hope to reach in 1919 by the steady influx of American troops, guns, aeroplanes, tanks, etc., and by the progressive exhaustion of the enemy's staying power, it remains to consider what action can meanwhile be taken against the enemy, elsewhere than in the main Western theatres, which may enable us to secure a decision far-reaching in its effect upon the political situation in the Near East and in Russia, both during and after the War, and valuable in paving the way towards a subsequent definitive decision against the enemy's main armies. To allow the year to pass without an attempt to secure a decision in any theatre of war, and to leave the initiative entirely to the enemy would, in the opinion of the Military Representatives, be a grave error in strategy apart from the moral effect such a policy might produce upon the Allied nations.

9. The possibility of achieving any far-reaching decision in the Balkan theatre is clearly excluded, for the present at any rate, by the strength and comparative homogeneity of the enemy forces, and by the great superiority of the enemy's system of communications. It is, indeed, possible that in this theatre the Allied forces may find themselves heavily attacked, and may be compelled to give ground. Such a contingency, though undesirable in itself, need give rise to no serious apprehensions provided always that

adequate preparations are made in good time for the occupation of shorter and stronger lines covering the mainland of Greece and if possible, Salonika.

10. There remains the Turkish theatre. To inflict such a crushing series of defeats upon the Turkish Armies as would lead to the final collapse of Turkey and her elimination from the War would not only have the most far-reaching results upon the general military situation, but might also if not too long deferred, be in time to enable the Allies to get into direct touch with, and give effective help to, such elements of resistance to German domination as may still exist in Roumania and Southern Russia. Even a lesser measure of success such as would definitely liberate the Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire from the Turkish yoke and compel the Germans to divert considerable forces to the East in order to save Turkey from destruction, would, both from the point of view of the military situation and from that of eventual peace negotiations, greatly strengthen the Allied position, and be worth any effort that can be made compatibly with the security of our defence in the Western theatres.

11. The present condition of Turkey is one of almost complete material and moral exhaustion. The Turkish forces have progressively dwindled, till they now amount to 250,000 men at the utmost, and will dwindle even more rapidly if seriously attacked owing to the entire lack of reserves. Such as they are these forces are dispersed, and are necessarily dispersed over enormous areas. The communications between the different fronts are so defective that any transfers of troops can only be carried out extremely slowly and with heavy wastage through sickness and desertion. The main railway communication with Constantinople and the Central Powers is itself of very limited capacity, and vulnerable to air attacks. Reinforcement of troops or munitions from Germany could only be accumulated very gradually, and the sending of them would involve a heavy strain on the enemy's transport resources.

12. The Military Representatives realise that in view of the potential menace to the Western Front, as well as in view of the difficulties of tonnage, there can be no question of a transfer of troops on any considerable scale from the Western to the Eastern theatre of operations under present circumstances. They consider, however, that the existing Allied forces in Palestine and Mesopotamia are already sufficiently superior to the enemy in numbers, equipment and morale to justify the hope that successful operations can be carried out with these forces providing they are maintained at full strength. They would also strongly urge that any additional minor reinforcements, such as could be provided by the termination of the East African operations, by the raising



of new units in India or in the French possessions, by the transfer of superfluous mounted troops from the Western theatre, or possibly at a later date by the transfer of one or two divisions from Salonika, if the enemy make no serious offensive in the Balkans, and the organisation of the Greek Army makes sufficient progress to enable it to be relied upon to replace the Divisions sent away, should be concentrated in the Turkish theatre.

13. The problem of securing a decisive result in this theatre is, however, not so much one of numbers as of means of communication. The difficulty is not so much that of dislodging the Turkish troops from a particular position as of being able to follow them up, prevent them rallying, receiving reinforcements and reorganising and so convert their retreat into rout and final annihilation. This is a question partly of the mobility of the Allied forces themselves, i.e., of their power to advance rapidly and at a considerable distance from their nearest railhead or port, and partly of the rapidity and energy with which the Allies can construct new railways—normal gauge, narrow light or aerial, as the case may be—repair existing ones and re-equip them with rolling stock, and open up and improve successive new supplementary bases in the coast ports. The effort required in this respect is a great one. But upon it depends the whole prospect of achieving any decisive result for the Allied cause in 1918, and looking upon the resources in material and in technical skill possessed by the Allies, not only in Europe, but in Egypt, India, the British Dominions, and the United States, the effort should not be beyond the compass of our powers.

14. The question of tonnage and escort is a serious limiting factor both as regards the actual supply of provisions and munitions for the troops and of railway material, and as regards the possibility of strategic operations depending on the movement of troops by sea. Everything that would facilitate the development of sources of supply east of the Suez Canal or locally—such as, for instance, the occupation of the Hauran—would ease the tonnage and escort situation in the Mediterranean and to that extent also help to liberate tonnage and escort for military movements by sea, if such movements were desirable for strategical reasons.

15. Aviation is of particular importance in this theatre of war, both because of the opportunities for strategical air offensives against the Turkish communications, and because of the general advantages which superiority in the air gives in regions where communications are limited, concealment difficult and anti-aircraft arrangements defective. This superiority is enjoyed by the Allied forces in the Turkish theatre at present and the necessary measures should be taken to maintain and, if possible, increase it. The creation of independent strategic aviation bases in Cyprus and in

the Aegean, and the organisation of the naval air services in the Eastern Mediterranean for concentrated strategic offensives, are essential elements in any scheme of serious operations against Turkey.

16. In considering both the Turkish situation in itself and the political objects which the Allies have in view in this quarter of the world, the Military Representatives are convinced of the necessity that strategy and policy should go absolutely hand in hand. While the success of the military operations may of itself bring about profound changes in the political situation in Turkey and the Near East generally, it is certain that these changes can be stimulated, and that success hastened on, by a definite, co-ordinated and vigorous political offensive both among the non-Turkish races of the Ottoman Empire and among the Turks themselves. Any lack of coherence on the part of the Foreign Offices in dealing with the political problems directly or indirectly connected with the Near Eastern situation, any evidence of mutual jealousy or of individual self-seeking, will be bound to prejudice not only the future settlement but the actual military operations.

17. The aspects upon which stress has been laid in the preceding paragraphs emphasise the need for the most energetic co-operation and the closest co-ordination not only of the Allied Military forces in Palestine, Mesopotamia and Armenia, but also of the Allied Naval and Air Forces along the whole coast of Asiatic Turkey, of the local Governments in Egypt, India, Cyprus, or from whatever country materials, supplies or labour can be furnished, and not least, of the Allied Foreign Offices. It is essential to the success of the offensive against Turkey that it should be envisaged not as a series of disconnected operations, but as a single co-ordinated scheme whose object is to eliminate one of the Enemy Powers from the War.

18. The Military Representatives do not consider it part of their function to prescribe the particular series of operations on the different fronts by which an offensive against Turkey can best be carried out. That can only be done by the Commander-in-Chief to whom the task of co-ordinating and executing these operations is entrusted. There are certain more immediate objectives, indeed, such as Haifa, the friendly grain-producing region of the Hauran, Damascus and Beirut, which seem clearly indicated not only by their military, economic and political importance, but also by the prospect of striking effective blows at the Turkish forces which are not likely to abandon them without a contest. But the object of the Military representatives is not to suggest specific geographical objectives, but to lay down a general line of policy which, to whatever extent it succeeds, will materially strengthen the position of the Allies, whether from the point of

view of the further prosecution of the struggle in 1919, or from that of the willingness of the enemy to concede reasonable terms of peace.

19. From this point of view the Military Representatives have examined with the greatest care the whole problem of the War of 1918, having laid down that *if certain conditions are fulfilled*, it will not be within the power of the enemy to reach a decision adverse to the Allies in the main Western theatres, having also come to the conclusion that the Allies cannot, apart from certain at present unforeseeable contingencies, in those theatres obtain a real decision against the enemy, and having considered all the factors bearing upon the military and political situation in the Turkish theatre, are of the opinion that the Allies should undertake a decisive offensive against Turkey with a view to the annihilation of the Turkish Armies and the collapse of Turkish resistance.

VEYGAND,  
Military Representative,  
French Section  
Supreme War  
Council.

HENRY WILSON,  
General Military  
Representative,  
British Section  
Supreme War  
Council.

L. CADORNA,  
Military Representative,  
Italian Section  
Supreme War  
Council.

Versailles,  
21st January, 1918.



## APPENDIX II

### CLEMENCEAU'S FIRST ADDRESS TO THE SUPREME ALLIED COUNCIL

I SUGGEST that the first task of the Supreme War Council is to consider the nature of the military campaigns to be undertaken in 1918. In order to enable us to reach a decision I suggest to my colleagues that we should invite our Permanent Military Advisers to study the whole situation in detail and to advise us as to the operations which they recommend.

The first step to be taken is for each Government to call for the views of its own General Staff, and these views should at once be transmitted to the Permanent Military Advisers of the Supreme War Council, and I would invite my colleagues to give instructions in this sense without delay.

There are certain recent changes in the situation to which I think we should particularly direct the attention of our Permanent Military Advisers in making their report to us.

The first of these is the situation in Russia. I propose that we should instruct our Permanent Military Advisers to assume as a basis of their studies that, in 1918, Russia cannot be counted on to render any effective military assistance. It will be for them to estimate, on the basis of the intelligence they will obtain from the General Staffs of the Allies, the amount of the forces which Russia's impotence will set free for operations on other fronts.

The second new factor is the situation in Italy. After a grave reverse, which came near to disaster, equilibrium has been re-established for the time being on the Italian Front. For the first time in the War, substantial British and French forces are engaged on that front. It is undeniable that the detachment of these forces makes a considerable drain on the strength of the Anglo-French forces on the Western Front, and correspondingly weakens their power of offence and defence. The fact that such large forces are concentrated on the Italian Front necessarily raises the question whether offensive operations are not indicated.

A third new factor introduced into the situation of 1918 is the gradual maturing of the forces of our new Ally, the United States of America, on the Western Front. To what extent can we count on the co-operation of the United States Army at different dates in 1918? This depends, to a large extent, upon the shipping situation, which

self constitutes one of the most vital factors in the investigations of the Permanent Military Advisers. During the last few days the shipping experts of the nations concerned have been examining this question, and they have been invited to prepare data as to the number of American divisions which it should be assumed for the purposes of calculation, can be transported to and maintained in France during 1918. The results of their investigations will be placed before you.

The restoration of the shipping situation itself has an important bearing on the intensity of the Allied effort in 1918. In order to avert the risk that any of the Allies may sink from exhaustion, a calamity which, at all costs, must be avoided, the restoration of the shipping situation is essential. Apart from naval measures for reducing our losses, two means are available for this. The first is to reduce our dependence upon imports by stimulating home production as much as circumstances permit, and by cutting down the needs of the population as far as possible; and the second is to increase the number of ships. Both these essentials make some demand upon our available man-power, and to that extent limit the number of men available for the armies. The Permanent Military Advisers must obtain from their respective Governments an estimate of the man-power available for 1918, after providing the bare necessities for ensuring the staying power of the nations concerned. I would ask that the conservation of man-power shall not be overlooked.

If the amount of shipping available affects the intensity of the military operations, the Permanent Military Advisers must also bear in mind that, conversely, the character of the military operations decided on and prepared for in 1918 reacts no less on the amount of shipping available for the accumulation of reinforcements in the future. For example, a prolonged operation of the character attempted on the Somme in 1916, and in Flanders in 1917, involved an expenditure of material far greater than defensive operations or than offensive operations of the type of the recent attacks on the Chemin des Dames or in the region of Cambrai. The accumulation of the vast supplies of warlike stores required for the former type of attack, and the transport of the raw materials for their manufacture, involve the use of tonnage which would otherwise be available for the transport of American troops.

I would propose to invite our Permanent Military Advisers in their examination of the problem, not to forget that the War has become largely one of exhaustion. It may be that victory will be achieved by endurance rather than by a military decision. Russia has already collapsed, at any rate, for the present, but it must be remembered that Turkey and Austria are neither of them very far from collapse. The final objective now, as formerly, is the overthrow of Prussian militarism, but I would ask the Permanent Military Advisers to weigh carefully whether possibly that object may not be brought nearer final

achievement by the overthrow, first of all, of Germany's allies, and the isolation of Germany: whether in fact the final overthrow of Germany may not best be reserved until the forces of the Allies, greatly augmented by a fully matured American Army, can be focused and concentrated as a climax to the War on this final objective.

In conclusion, I suggest that each Government represented here to-day should give its definite undertaking to furnish to our Permanent Military Advisers all the information that they require for the examination of these grave problems.

Apart from the question of primary importance which I have just referred to, there is a point of great immediate importance to which the attention of the Permanent Military Advisers should be directed. I refer to the military situation in the Balkans. I suggest that it is a proper subject for present inquiry by our Military Advisers whether the Allied forces in the Balkans are so disposed, and in such strength, that they may be expected to hold their own against any force which can reasonably be brought against them.

There is one point which I would ask our Permanent Military Representatives to bear carefully in mind, namely, that their function is to advise the Supreme War Council as a whole and not merely as the representatives of their respective nations on the Council. They are required to view the problems confronting them not from a national standpoint, but from that of the Allies as a whole. I trust that, as far as possible, their advice will be unanimous, and that it will be submitted to the Supreme War Council in a collective form carrying with it the signature of each of the Permanent Military Representatives.

Paris,

28th November, 1917.



## EXTENSION OF THE BRITISH FRONT

ONE of the most tiresome questions which British and French Governments had to adjust from time to time was the extension of the line to be held by the British Army on the Western Front. The French were compelled to put forth their utmost effort in the first years of the War when we were not ready. As our Army grew and grew with amazing rapidity, the French, who had borne the brunt of the fighting during the first two years of the War and had sustained immense losses, naturally pressed us to take over more and still more of the line which they had held so gallantly, but at such cost, whilst we were preparing. Our Generals sometimes treated these demands with consideration. Now and again, when they were incompatible with ambitious plans they were cherishing, they were inclined to be sticky or almost stingy. The delays caused by disputes over extension of the line were responsible for some serious setbacks in the War. I have already dealt with the postponement of the Nivelle offensive, due partly to Haig's reluctance to take over more line. Nivelle could not constitute the army of manœuvre that was an essential part of his scheme until Haig had released some of the French divisions by taking over part of the line. Decisive weeks were wasted over this somewhat selfish feud.

The consequent postponement of the operation enabled the Germans to bring up reserves from the East. I shall in a later chapter show how the delays and the temper aroused by taking over more line on the Somme in the winter of 1917-18 were fatal to the effective organisation of defences in that sector which was attacked so successfully by the Germans, and equally disastrous in its influence on the distribution of forces and particularly of reserves. In the absence of a united front, taking human nature as it is, these unfortunate clashes were inevitable. Great generals, even in the exercise of their profession, are not above the pettiness in motive and temper which has marred many a promising enterprise in other spheres.

At the end of 1917 the British Expeditionary Forces of all ranks and services in all the theatres of war numbered 2,759,419, excluding coloured labour corps. We had 1,978,393 men in France and Flanders. Our great new army had fought its first battle on the Somme in the summer of 1916. Up to that date the brunt of the fighting and therefore of the casualties had fallen on the French. The French



War Memoirs of David Lloyd George.

Stanford, London.

resisted the German invading army in September, 1914, in a succession of great battles fought on a front of hundreds of miles. The French losses were enormous. The great offensives of 1915 in Artois and Champagne were in the main conducted with French troops. And the sanguinary Battle of Verdun which lasted for several months and cost the defending army hundreds of thousands was fought exclusively between the French and the Germans. Our losses on that scale began at the Battle of the Somme in the third campaign of the War. France was now coming to an end of her resources in young men fit for battle. Sir Douglas Haig called attention to this exhaustion when he stated his case for the Passchendaele offensive. On the other hand, the contribution of men we sent overseas to our armies from Britain and the Dominions had grown each year and in 1918 we reached the climax. It was inevitable, therefore, that the French should constantly press us to take over more line.

Colonel Repington, one of the most brilliant of our military critics, and one who was accorded the special confidence of the Army leaders at home and was chosen by them as their special champion and spokesman in the Press against meddlesome politicians, put the French case for the taking over of more line by the British Army in poignant language. Needless to say, he was not stating the facts in order to support that plea. He was using them in another conjunction and for a totally different purpose. They are nevertheless so relevant to an examination of the merits of this particular controversy that I quote them. Motive cannot alter facts. Writing on January 24th, 1918, after pointing out that the French Army was seriously reduced in numerical strength, he adds:—

“I want to tell the people of England, and particularly those ministerial poltroons who bleat about our losses, that our total casualties killed, wounded, and missing—since the War began—are but little higher than the number of the French dead. The only suitable recognition that we can make of French heroism is to help them in their hour of need.”

In view of the subsequent history of the French sector so reluctantly and tardily taken over by the British G.H.Q., and of the animadversions surrounding the transaction, a full statement of the facts regarding it are of considerable historic importance. Fortunately, there exists abundant official record of all the proceedings, and I propose to leave these to speak for themselves.

In the summer of 1917, the feeling steadily gained ground among the French that the British ought to be willing to take over a larger proportion of the line. They would have much preferred our helping them in this way than our setting out on the “duck’s march through Flanders,” to quote Foch’s apt phrase. In July, a French Deputy who



was chairman of a Parliamentary Committee appointed to examine the question of French man-power, approached our Ambassador in Paris with the plea that we should relieve the strain on the depleted resources of French manhood by extending our front. They were facing the problem of war-weariness among their people, the mutinies in their Army, the casualties incurred in a struggle where they had hitherto borne by far the largest part of the fighting and the loss. The density of troops on our front was double or treble that of the French. Besides, the French, with a smaller total population than we, had put nearly all their able-bodied manhood in uniform, and without the help of some of these, their lands could not be tilled nor their harvests gathered, and the nation would be threatened with food shortage. We had (so it was contended) far too many troops in England.

There existed contrary arguments. Considerable sectors of the French Front were "quiet:" there was little military activity on them and no great likelihood of major offensives; and the French had considerable room for manœuvre behind their part of the line, if they should be dislodged from their positions, without being perilously driven away from contact with their bases. The British, on the other hand, cramped in the northern part of the line, had little room for manœuvre, and a serious loss of ground would drive them into the sea or away from their bases at the channel ports; and hardly any part of their front could be called "quiet:" it was the scene of constant military activity, and opposite to it there were large German forces. Yet after allowing for these arguments, there was still a marked disproportion between the forces behind the respective fronts; and the actual facts of gigantic losses sustained by the French, the temporarily weakened morale of their troops, and the desperate shortage of workers for their essential agriculture, could not be gainsaid.

Accordingly, when at the Boulogne Conference of September 25th, 1917, M. Painlevé, the French Prime Minister, accompanied by General Foch, his Chief of Staff, met Sir William Robertson and myself, and reported the strong pressure of the demand in the French Chamber for the British to take over a larger part of the front, we could not refuse to consider this request. At this discussion Sir William Robertson sympathised with the French demand and considered that it ought to be met. He said that:—

"the question must be regulated on the basis of next year's plans of operations. The matter should, therefore, be left for arrangement between Field-Marshal Haig and General Pétain as soon as the offensive operations now in progress come to an end. So far as the Governments were concerned, the principle of taking over more of the line was already admitted."

On the other hand, it was clear that the military considerations involved in such a step must in the first instance be a matter for examination and, if possible, adjustment by and between the Commanders-in-Chief of the two armies concerned. We eventually reached agreement in the following terms:—

“The British Government, having accepted in principle the extension of the line held by the British Army on the Western Front, the two Governments are agreed that the question of the amount of the extension and the time at which it should take place should be left for arrangement between the two Commanders-in-Chief.”

This agreement I communicated on the following day to Sir Douglas Haig, whom I visited at G.H.Q.

The Commander-in-Chief did not give a direct refusal to the French demand. But he certainly did not entertain it with cordiality.

That very morning he had captured a few kilometres of Flemish mire, and General Charteris came into the room whilst we were discussing the French appeal to inform his Chief that he had received the most reliable reports showing that three more German divisions had been completely shattered. He added to these the 50 or more enemy divisions which had already been destroyed. Haig naturally felt at such a moment that to send troops to occupy quiet trenches was a poor use to make of a victorious army. Pétain's tired and demoralised troops were good enough for that. It was evident to me that the fundamental conflict of views between the British and French commands as to the strategy to be pursued once more complicated the issue as it had already done when a similar proposal was made in the early spring. In the case of Nivelle the clash of plans involved an element of personal rivalry between two Commanders who each sought for his own army the leading part in a great operation which promised decisive results. In this case the French Generals considered Haig's idea of an offensive enterprise to be premature. Foch and Pétain were strongly of the opinion that the new situation created by the collapse of Russia, the deep repugnance felt by all ranks of fighting men in the French Army to mass attacks on the German entrenchments, and the accession of an unprepared America to the Allied side, could be best met by a suspension of great offensives, until the American Army was ready to throw in its full weight; and meanwhile that a defensive attitude should be maintained, varied by limited offensives whenever and wherever the opportunity was favourable for striking a blow at the enemy. They also advocated pressure on other and weaker flanks of the enemy line on other battle fronts. Haig on the other hand urged a concentrated offensive on a great scale with a view to driving the enemy out of Flanders and outflanking him in that direction. The disastrous and costly failure of that plan only stimulated him to justify his project by a resumption of his attacks in the

spring of 1918. He did not desist from his intention until it became clear to him that the reinforcements available could not furnish a number of men sufficient to overcome an army which was reinforced by picked divisions withdrawn from Russia. A man reluctantly forced to abandon plans which seem to him to present hopes of glorious achievement never throws himself whole-heartedly into the working of alternative schemes which he has consistently set aside as inferior to his own. It looks to him too much like an admission of a fundamental error of judgment in his original conception. This mood working on an obstinate mind accounts for what happened in the rearrangement of forces rendered necessary when a great German offensive in the spring of 1918 grew certain. It was this mood which I encountered in my conversation with Marshal Haig. I found him stubbornly opposed to the proposal. He was never articulate in the expression of his views at an interview. He however promised to send me a Memorandum as to his views on the military outlook in the event of Russia being forced out of the War. That I received about the 10th October. In it he expressed his opinion about the question of extending his front. Here is an extract:—

“The armies have undergone almost superhuman exertion and hardships during the last few months, and unless the demands made on them during the winter are reduced to a minimum they cannot be expected to respond fully to the further heavy calls entailed by a renewal of the offensive next year.”

Haig by this time realised that his break through could not be achieved, as he had confidently anticipated, in the course of this year. He therefore contemplated renewing his attacks in the same sector early in the spring of 1918.

“I urge this point very strongly and it entails resistance to any French demands on us to take over more line. A refusal by us to do so will undoubtedly be both justifiable and wise.”

Pointing out that the French Army was not in a mood for offensives, and that the British would therefore be the only attacking force, and that the French soldiers got more leave than the British, he proceeded:—

“This aspect of the case must not be overlooked any more than the purely military arguments, and it is on popular feeling amongst the French people rather than on military argument that the French demand on us to take over more line is based. The actual extent of front measured by miles is no test of what we should hold. The true test is the relative number of enemy divisions engaged by us,



and still more the rôle to be allotted to us in next year's campaign (i.e., the renewal of the offensive). For all these reasons it is necessary in my opinion to refuse to take over more line and to adhere resolutely to that refusal, even to the point of answering threats by threats if necessary."

Haig wanted all his forces to repeat his Flanders blunder. He could not, therefore, spare a man for any other part of the front.

The discussions between the soldiers passed into that phase, all too familiar among the Franco-British forces throughout the War until we eventually achieved unity of command, of pleas and protests and counter-protests, of appeals by the respective Commanders-in-Chief to their Governments for support, and of reproaches, consultations and official representations, leading to nothing but misunderstanding. These constituted the usual dreary preliminaries to every compromise agreement. Valuable time was wasted, and essential defensive preparations in the contested area were completely neglected.

The French Government continued to urge upon me the necessity of an extension of the British line. But in accordance with the decision of the Boulogne Conference, I left the matter at this stage for the soldiers to discuss between themselves. The Cabinet thought the French had a case for an extension of our front, and that opinion was imparted to Haig, but the details were left to be settled between the Commanders. I therefore urged the C.I.G.S. to arrange an early meeting between Haig and Pétain. That took place about mid-October at Amiens and resulted in an agreement about extension, but not about strategy.

The nature of the agreement is stated by Marshal Pétain in a letter by him on October 23rd to the British Commander-in-Chief:—

"In accordance with my expressed request you have fixed the date for the extension of your front for the last week in November. The relief operations will thus have no repercussion upon the development of the battle in Flanders. The number of divisions which you are intending to put into the line will easily bring your right as far as the Oise."

He had pressed Haig to extend his line a little further to the south. He gives his reasons for that request in this letter. Haig in his reply on the 2nd November writes:—

"As I have already told you, I am prepared to prolong my right up to the Oise; I can even fall in with your wishes by relieving a sector, insignificant in extent, south of the river."

The limit of this further extension was fixed by the two Commanders-in-Chief at Barisis.

The taking-over by the British of the French line up to Barisis had thus been agreed to between Haig and Pétain by the beginning of November. It is important to note that no extension of the British line further than this took place before the great German offensive in March.

The agreement between the Generals was only the beginning of trouble. Haig thoroughly disliked the idea of parting with divisions which he had depended upon for his mass of manœuvre in the spring renewal of his Flemish campaign. He went back on the arrangement both in substance and in time. He pleaded that he could not spare the necessary divisions to carry out the full extensions he had promised. Even the restricted relief to the French which he undertook was indefinitely postponed.

The French grew impatient at this attitude. M. Clemenceau demanded to know when the promised relief was to take place. The C.I.G.S. telegraphed this query to Haig on December 1st, and got the reply that since the arrangement had been made with General Pétain he had been compelled to send divisions to Italy and to use at Cambrai those detailed to begin the relief on the French Front. As active operations were still in progress, he did not feel justified then in carrying out any extension at all.

This was naturally a very unsatisfactory reply for the French. If we had promised five divisions to Italy, they had undertaken to send six.

Pétain wrote on December 14th to press that the relief should be begun, and told his Government that if it were not carried out he would refuse to continue to accept responsibility for the safety of the French Front. Clemenceau, who strongly supported Pétain, thereupon sent us word that he would himself resign unless the British took over the front as far as Berry-au-bac, an extension 37 miles longer than the one originally requested. We agreed that the arrangements already entered into between the two Commanders-in-Chief for extension to Barisis must be honourably fulfilled, but we could not assent to the further demand. We succeeded in persuading Clemenceau to allow the matter of the further extension to Berry-au-bac to be referred to the Supreme War Council; and pending its discussion there, the Military Representatives at Versailles were asked to examine the question. Information to this effect was wired to Sir Douglas Haig on December 15th.

The news decided Sir Douglas Haig. Without waiting to see what would be the verdict of Versailles, he met Pétain on December 17th and after giving a number of reasons for delay, agreed to relieve two French divisions by January 10th and complete the relief to the River Oise before the end of January. This arrangement Pétain accepted, and it was in due course carried out.

Early in January I received an urgent communication from M. Clemenceau pressing us to exercise our authority as a Government to

order Haig to agree as to the further extension requested by Pétain. As we were anxious as a Cabinet to obtain Haig's opinions on the military position as a whole, I appealed to him to come over to confer with us on the subject. Haig informed us, when the matter of the extension of the front was raised, that he was on the point of taking over the line up to the River Oise, and that General Pétain seemed to be quite satisfied with this arrangement.

As to the demand made by M. Clemenceau for a further extension, the Permanent Military Representatives at Versailles went carefully into the whole question—the relative strength of the fronts, the opposing enemy forces, the respective needs for relief and training; and reached the conclusion that the logically right point for the juncture of the respective fronts was neither Barisis nor Berry-au-bac, but the left bank of the Ailette on the Laon-Soissons road, a point which was 14 miles beyond Barisis.

The Joint Note of the Military Representatives in which this recommendation was recorded (Joint Note No. 10), was issued on January 10th, 1918. Although Haig and Pétain had reached an agreement with regard to the extension to Barisis, Pétain, backed by Clemenceau, was at this time still pressing for more—in fact, for the extension to Berry-au-bac.

At the Meeting of the Supreme War Council which was held on February 1st, I anticipated to some extent the discussion about extension of the line by proposing that in view of the fact that the French and ourselves had no less than eleven divisions in Italy, we should bring a contingent of Italian troops to France. The minutes record that I said:—

“Before coming to the question of the extension of the British line, or the creation of the reserves, I suggest, if my Italian colleague would consent, that we ought to discuss the question of bringing Italian troops to the Western Front. The alternative is to bring the British and French troops from the Italian to the Western Front. This, however, is undesirable from the point of view of morale. Hence it would be better to bring Italian troops here.”

I then called attention to the figures in tables prepared by the Allied Staffs, for the information of the Supreme War Council, and I pointed out that on the Italian Front according to these tables, “there were 1,440,000 Allied compared with 860,000 enemy combatants, a superiority of 580,000 combatants; whereas on the French Front, the Allied superiority was only 160,000 combatants.” I further pointed out that the movement of enemy troops was towards the French rather than towards the Italian Front.

Signor Orlando, the Italian Prime Minister, said he was “in principle in entire agreement with Mr. Lloyd George,” and he



proceeded to support my proposal with emotional warmth. M. Clemenceau summed up the remarks of Signor Orlando and Baron Sonnino in the sense that the Italian Government would leave the decision as to such a movement to the new War Board which it was proposed to set up to take charge of the General Reserve. It is significant of the general attitude of the British and French Staffs that although they knew at that time that German reinforcements for the West were pouring in from Russia, they took no steps to implement this valuable Italian promise until after March 21st. This indifference or slackness was partly due to their lack of appreciation of the fighting value of the Italian infantry, who, it is only fair to say, fought well when they ultimately came to France. But so far as the French were concerned the slackness was partly attributable to their suspicion that the proposal, if adopted, would be used by the British as a further excuse for not taking up more line.

The prospect of a possible reinforcement of the French Front by Italian troops did not therefore avail to appease the urgency of the French demand for a further extension of the British line to Berry-aubac. When Note No. 10 came up for review on February 2nd, M. Clemenceau proposed that since the point on the left bank of the Ailette was that fixed by the joint advice of the military experts it should be accepted, and the Commanders-in-Chief be asked to agree to arrangements for the carrying out of the recommendation. But Haig promptly protested.

“With the effectives at present at his disposal, it was impossible for him to extend his front beyond the point that he had agreed upon with General Pétain . . . With the utmost desire to comply in every way possible with the French demands, he felt bound to point out to the Supreme War Council that with the troops now at his disposal it was quite out of the question for him to take over any more front.”

I then intervened to ask General Pétain whether he had agreed with Sir Douglas Haig that the British Front should extend to Barisis only. Pétain replied that:—

“it was true that there had been an agreement between himself and Sir Douglas Haig to the effect that the British Front should be extended to Barisis. Later, however, he had been compelled to ask for a further considerable extension. . . .”

Inasmuch as it has been suggested that the British Government, and particularly myself, were responsible for forcing Sir Douglas Haig, against his better judgment, to accept this further extension, I will now quote fully the statement which I made upon the recommendation of the Supreme Council:—

"MR. LLOYD GEORGE asked that before the Joint Note was adopted he might be allowed to put before the Supreme War Council certain very serious considerations. The Field-Marshal had said that he could hardly be held responsible for the security of his front if he had to extend his line. He had pointed out that the most vital parts of the Allied Fronts were held by the British. The British lines of communication ran parallel to their front, and the enemy were only ten miles off; this constituted a very dangerous situation. Further, an advance of a few kilometres by the Germans on the French Front would not be a very grave matter. If, however, the Germans advanced only six miles in Flanders they would deprive us of certain valuable coal mines which at present provide no less than ten million tons of coal a year. If they were deprived of this supply of coal it would have to be made up by Great Britain. This would mean a large diversion of labour to the coal mines, and of tonnage for the transportation of coal across the Channel. The second point was partly military and partly political in character. The French soldier by the law of his country—and he would remind the Council that the French were fighting on their own soil—got leave every four months; the British soldier on the other hand, got leave only once a year. The British Army had come to be aware of this fact, which was causing the gravest dissatisfaction. No doubt this disparity in regard to the granting of leave was in part due to the shortage of tonnage, but it was a serious consideration which could not be ignored. He would remind the Supreme War Council that the British Commander-in-Chief had said that if he had to extend his front he could not be responsible for the security of his line. If, therefore, the Council decided to accept the recommendation of the Military Representatives, a very grave responsibility would rest upon them. There were then three considerations which he wished to put before his colleagues:—

1. That the British hold a line which covered indispensable ports and valuable coal mines, neither of which was it possible for us to relinquish.

2. The question of leave.

3. The British had borne the brunt of the fighting during the past year, and as they had advanced their line in many places it was impossible to give the men the rest they badly needed, as it was necessary to prepare new lines of defence. Further, these lines had to be constructed in the abominable climate of Flanders, which was very different from the climate of Italy for instance.

If in addition to the dissatisfaction caused by the disparity in regard to leave, by the necessity of having to forgo their well-earned rest in order to construct new lines of defence, the British Army

were told that they had to take over a new portion of the French Front they would be seriously disheartened to say the least of it. He therefore would again press that a solution of the difficulty might be found by transferring Italian divisions to France. A large contribution of Italian troops to the Western Front would, in his opinion, best solve the most difficult problem which M. Clemenceau and he had to consider. Mr. Lloyd George thought that the question of the extension of the line and that of the transference of Italian troops to Flanders should be considered together."

Signor Orlando then gave general support to my plea, and he referred to the proposal which I had made at the preceding meeting, that the difficulties should be solved by inviting the Italian Government to send divisions to France to take over this part of the line. He concluded by saying:—

"He agreed with Mr. Lloyd George that the question of the extension of the line and of Italian troops being sent to France must be considered together, and that they were questions for the deliberation of their military experts."

After a reply from General Pétain, a note was passed to me—as far as I can recollect, from Sir Maurice Hankey—stating to my great surprise that Field-Marshal Haig had changed his mind and did not now view the proposed extension as altogether unacceptable. I then intervened further to say (I will now quote the Minute):—

"Mr. Lloyd George said he understood that the Field-Marshal would now be prepared to accept the recommendations in Joint Note No. 10 [i.e., the recommendation for further extension] in principle subject to an agreement between himself and General Pétain as to the method of giving effect to it. The resolution therefore that was about to be moved must not be regarded as an order requiring immediate execution."

The actual Resolution that was passed in reference to this respect is recorded in the following terms:—

"Resolution in regard to the extension of the British Front. The Supreme War Council adopt Note 10; subject to the time and method of the extension of the British Line being left for arrangement between General Pétain and the Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig."

Haig and Pétain subsequently met and came to an understanding to take no further action for the time being on this troubled question.



These, therefore, are the actual facts as to what took place. I proposed that the difficulties which had arisen on the question of the extension of the British line should be solved by the sending of 11 Italian divisions to France in substitution for the British and French divisions on the Italian Front. The Italian Prime Minister warmly accepted the proposition and was prepared to recommend it to his military authorities. When the actual discussion of the proposals of the Supreme Council for extension came up for discussion I strongly supported Sir Douglas Haig's protest, and again urged the alternative of Italian troops. The Italian Prime Minister supported my protest, and again urged the idea of Italian troops. Sir Douglas Haig then, without any previous consultation with me, withdrew his objection and agreed with Pétain to take over further line in accordance with the recommendations of the Council. In actual fact, this extension which Haig agreed to in principle, even after my strong protest at his request and on his behalf, was not carried out, and the only result of his untimely intervention was that the proposal for making arrangements to bring 11 Italian divisions to France was dropped, and not revived until after the March offensive. The actual extension which took place was the one that Haig had himself agreed to with Pétain at Conferences where no member of the Government was present.

In view of these facts, of which there is official record in contemporary documents, it is rather hard that the whole of the responsibility should be placed on my shoulders and that it should be suggested that Haig was compelled by me to take over a line which he had not sufficient troops to defend.

I would specially draw attention here to the very misleading account of what took place as the result of the Versailles meeting which is given in the Official History of the War: —

“At the meeting which took place between Sir Douglas Haig and General Pétain on the 17th December the latter urged as reasons for the extension, that the British offensive operations had come to an end, and that there were fears of a German attack on his troops near Châlons and through Switzerland. Sir Douglas Haig represented that the British troops after the recent severe fighting required a period of rest, and that the strength of units, depleted by casualties, was not being replenished by drafts from England; but nevertheless, he would relieve two divisions on the 10th January and endeavour to take over as far as the Oise by the end of the month; but the precise date for the later relief could only be settled when the situation became clearer. This arrangement General Pétain accepted. However favourable the situation might become, he had no intention of making any ‘main attack’ before August, thus confirming his earlier statement to Sir Douglas Haig.

It was not until the 10th January, after an interval of over three weeks, that the Military Representatives at Versailles made their formal recommendation, without giving reasons, that the point of junction of the French and British Armies should be on the left bank of the Ailette, between that river and the Soissons-Laon road, about 17 miles from the Oise, but left the exact point to be decided by the two Commanders-in-Chief, who eventually fixed it at 5½ miles eastwards of the Oise."

This omits every reference to the objections I raised to any further extension of the line, and it creates an impression that as a result of what took place at Versailles, Haig had to make a further extension of his line, and that on a recommendation which was never formulated before January 10th. As a matter of fact, Haig never extended his line a single yard beyond the limit fixed in an agreement which he had entered into with Pétain on October 18th, 1917.

This paragraph is probably due to one of these oversights to which all historians are liable. Whoever wrote this misrepresentation must have had in front of him the actual Minutes of the Meeting.\* The least I can say about the writer who, with such information at his disposal, penned such a distortion, is that he made a slovenly use of the documents at his disposal.

Was the extension of our line which took place in January justified? It is clear that the grounds for it were both military and political. On the political side it must be remembered that feeling in France had reached a state of irritation at what appeared to be a flagrantly unequal proportion of the front held by the British: this feeling, for which there was much warrant, was a fact that could not be ignored or argued away. In order to maintain good relations with our ally, and ease the tension of French public opinion, worn down by the long and bitter sufferings of the War, it was essential that we should make some concession of this sort, unless it could be shown beyond peradventure that such action would inevitably entail disaster for the Allied Armies. The military considerations were just as strong. Prior to the extension, the British held less than 100 miles of front, the French more than 350 miles, although the British forces were two-thirds the size of the French. Even after the British had added these 28 miles to their front, they held about 125 miles to the French 325 miles of front. In view of the far greater density of the British forces, it would be ludicrous to suggest that this comparatively small addition to the line they held was from a military standpoint unsound, taking into consideration the requirements of the Allied Front in France as a whole. After all due weight has been given to other grounds alleged by Sir Douglas Haig for objecting to taking

\* He rectifies it in a later page (p. 79) without calling attention to the previous mis-statement.

over this sector, the fact stands out that his main objection was because using part of his forces for this would render him less capable of resuming his Flanders offensive in the spring. He urged in this connection that the alternative to continuing the offensive was to let the initiative pass to the enemy. But since in any event he could not have resumed a Flanders offensive as early as March, because the state of the ground there would have rendered it impossible, that the Germans still would have been free to take the initiative as they did, further south, in March, if Haig had kept a larger force at Passchendaele, and the St. Quentin sector had been still held by the attenuated French Army.

The extremely able Staff officers working at Versailles—and they included both Italian and American experts—were in fact satisfied that on military grounds the British Army should have taken over, not less, but 12 miles more than they actually did. That was military advice. There was no politician on the body of experts who examined the question. This operation of taking over has often been alleged as one of the various causes which contributed to the German breakthrough on this front in March, 1918. That allegation cannot be justified on military grounds.

The British had far more ample resources for holding this sector strongly than the French. The trouble was that they did not distribute them wisely. This is a matter into which I shall have to enter more fully when I come to the dispositions made for the great battle which all knew was coming.



## THE FALL OF ROBERTSON

THE decisions of Versailles on the formation of a General Reserve were designed to give the Allies for the first time the benefit conferred by a united front, first in defence and then in attack. The Germans had enjoyed that advantage on the Western Front right through the War and it had enabled them to hold long lines against armies which had a numerical superiority of 50 per cent. When they saw that the Nivelle offensive was impending and that they were to be attacked on a great scale by preponderant numbers, they constituted a strong reserve behind their lines, of divisions drawn partly from the sectors of the Western line from which they could be best spared, and partly from Roumania. Hence a defence which was so successful that it put the French Army out of action as a seriously offensive force for the rest of the year.

Had the Versailles project been put into operation a similar stunning rebuff would have been given to the German spring offensive after perhaps a slight preliminary success, the German collapse would have come sooner and the British losses would not have been nearly so heavy. British and French divisions would have been drawn in time from parts of the line where they were too thick on the ground, and as it became increasingly evident at what point the German attack was coming, the reserves would have moved into positions where they would have been readily available when the German attack developed. Divisions would also have been brought from Italy—either French, British or Italian. Arrangements might have been made for conveying British divisions from Palestine and substituting Indian divisions from Mesopotamia, where the Allies had a superiority of six to one. All this was done later on. But it was after the worst defeat that had befallen the British Army during the whole of the War.

After the Versailles meeting there began to ferment on our home front events which rapidly developed into a serious political crisis and for a few days threatened the life of the Ministry, and paralysed our efforts to deal firmly with the hesitancies of the Commander-in-Chief on the question of the General Reserve. The trouble arose from the machinations of that military clique which had thwarted every effort I had made during the War either to equip the Army, or to prevent a wasteful use being made of the enormous resources in

men and material placed at their disposal, or to achieve that effective unity of front which alone could enable us to make a decisive use of the advantages we possessed in men, material, and command of the sea.

That the German General Staff depended upon the activities of this junta is demonstrated by one of the documents published by General Ludendorff after the War. In a memorandum which is marked “Very Secret” attention is called to the weaknesses of the Alliance with which the Central Powers are confronted. One of them is thus described:—

“Another disruptive element will be the *English Military Party* [the italics are theirs, not mine] which will come forward and try at last to get rid of the Lloyd George they loathe so heartily.”

We were about to witness a very determined effort—not the first nor the last—made by this party to form a cabal which would overthrow the existing War Cabinet and especially its Chief, and enthrone a Government which would be practically the nominee and menial of this military party. Exactly the same situation had arisen in Germany in July, 1916. The German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, determined to end the War, if he could, by a negotiated peace; so Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and their Military clique overthrew him, and from that point onwards took over the political direction of Germany. The causes of the German defeat were investigated by the Reichstag after the War, and many statesmen of the Central Powers have written on the subject. No one can doubt that the cause of Germany's defeat lay in the usurpation of political powers by the military leaders. Bismarck had had almost exactly the same trouble in 1870 and 1866, but, with a great effort, had checked this attempted usurpation. Bethmann-Hollweg could not: in fact, it was their political system that failed the Germans. The same attempt was made by a military clique here, but did not succeed. Our political system did not fail us.

General Pétain and Marshal Haig did not relish the idea of having their reserves commanded by Foch. Not only did it pass the control of the forthcoming campaign into Foch's hands, but it removed divisions from their direct control in order to create such a Reserve. The hostility of the two Commanders-in-Chief, however, did not show itself immediately. Sir William Robertson, on the other hand, lost no time in taking action of a hostile character. When Sir Henry Wilson had first sketched out the project of the General Reserve to him he seemed quite enamoured of the idea, but in its original form the plan provided that the Controlling Board should consist of the three Chiefs of the General Staff, of whom Sir William Robertson would be one. That provision was dropped in the course of the discussions at Versailles because there were obvious practical objections to it. The General Reserve was intended to be brought

into action in the event of a sudden emergency. Even before the emergency arose the intelligence received in the course of the coming weeks would involve a rearrangement in the location of the reserves. It is evident that neither the Italian nor the British Chiefs of the Staff could be present to take part in a decision until a great many fateful hours had passed. That is why it was imperative that the members of the Board should always be on the spot, ready for continuous consultation and decision without a moment's delay. As soon as the Supreme Council came to that conclusion, Sir William Robertson altered his attitude towards the whole scheme. A brilliant witness of the proceedings at Versailles writes:—

"Robertson, not unnaturally, was furious. This was quite visible. Long after the Supreme War Council had risen, after passing this resolution, and only a few secretaries being left in the room, Robertson still remained sitting alone in his place, motionless, his head resting on his hand, glaring silently in front of him."\*

The first intimation the Cabinet received of brewing trouble was at a meeting of the War Cabinet held immediately on my return from Versailles, at which I reported the decisions arrived at by the Supreme War Council, dwelling particularly upon the proposals in reference to the formation of the General Reserve. Lord Derby, who was accompanied to the meeting by Sir William Robertson, stated that he had not yet had sufficient time to study the reports submitted in regard to this question, and therefore must reserve judgment thereon. In reply I pointed out that as the matter had been decided unanimously by the Allied Representatives, and by myself and Lord Milner, who had been endowed by the War Cabinet with full authority to deal with this question on their behalf, I trusted that the matter would be considered by the Army Council in a most helpful spirit, and that there would be no delay in preparing the necessary Order in Council, if such were required, to give effect to their decision.

The first open shot was fired by the *Morning Post* in a telegram which it printed on February 8th from its "Military Correspondent in Paris," and which ran as follows:—

"Paris, 5th February.

The decisions of the recent inter-Allied War Council regarding the control of British troops in the field are reported to be of such a strange character that Parliament should demand the fullest details and a Parliamentary Committee should examine them at once and take the opinions of our General Staff and of our Commanders in the field concerning the new arrangements."

There is no secret about the origin and the inspiration of this

\* Peter E. Wright: "At the Supreme War Council," p. 61.



message. It was sent by Colonel Repington, who afterwards admitted his authorship and came out into the open under his own name with communications in the same vein. He was on intimate terms with Sir William Robertson, the C.I.G.S., and an active collaborator with the military clique which, as I have previously related, was intriguing with all the discontented elements in politics to overthrow the Government. Repington was the favoured confidant of the General Staff, whenever there were any criticisms that they wished to see directed against the War Cabinet and its policy. They supplied him with all the necessary material in the form of tit-bits of information, carefully selected, of course, and of a tendentious character. His diaries, where he records the interviews he had from time to time with Sir William Robertson and his principal coadjutor, the Director of Military Operations, Sir Frederick Maurice, and some mysterious person in the confidence of the War Office, who is referred to by Repington as "X," show how complete was his collaboration with the General Staff.

The communication from their Military Correspondent appeared in the *Morning Post* on February 8th, and the same evening the *Globe* reprinted what they called the "disquieting telegram" published by their contemporary. They further proceeded to pass upon it comments which are full of significance having regard to what happened subsequently:—

"... It may be hoped that, as Mr. Asquith was responsible for entrusting the Higher Command to Sir Douglas Haig, as Commander-in-Chief in the field, and Sir William Robertson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in London—who both to a peculiar degree enjoy the confidence of the British Army and the British nation—he will not stand by and allow this arrangement to be broken up to gratify the whim of any individuals, however important. It may also be hoped that the House of Commons, which claims to be the seat of power, will refuse to allow itself to be elbowed out of its proper functions, and that at least we may be allowed to know what is going on behind the scenes, as no arrangement can make for military efficiency that precipitates a crisis in our Higher Command on the eve of a new campaign. Is there or is there not a Generalissimo?"

This article was sent to me by Lord Milner with the following covering letter:—

"17 Great College Street, S.W.,

8/2/18.

My dear Prime Minister,

You have no doubt seen the enclosed from the *Globe*.

I think the sooner we make a move the better. This kind of thing cannot be allowed to go on.

About Haig, I greatly doubt whether he would make common cause with only W.O. people against the Government. I think he is too loyal to lend himself to such proceedings.

On the other hand, I do think that he is likely to offer a resistance of his own to the proposal that he should allow any of his divisions to be placed in a General Reserve. He will use all the arguments with which we are so familiar, and he will never be convinced—as he is incapable of seeing any point of view but his own—that the creation of a General Reserve may end in giving him a much larger army than he has at present.

Now the creation of the General Reserve is the key of the whole business. It is not only clearly right in strategy, but it is the basis of our quite good understanding with the French.

It is no use having a great rumpus and getting rid of Robertson, if the policy is to be side-tracked, for quite different reasons, by Haig.

But Haig will, I believe, obey orders, if he once clearly understands that your mind is made up. And if he were to stick his toes in the ground, which I do not anticipate, it would be better to lose both Haig and Robertson than to continue at the mercy of both or either of them. The situation is much too critical for that and no time should be lost. The Army would be quite happy, if the worst came to the worst, with Plumer and Harrington vice Haig and Bertie Lawrence, and would not then so much care who was the C.I.G.S. Du Cane, in fact, would fill the bill.

'Plumer as C.-in-C.,' a brigadier fresh from the field said to me the other day, 'would be worth ten extra divisions.' Extravagant, of course. I merely quote as showing that any change which brought Plumer more to the front would be popular.

I don't *want* this, I like the plan you sketched this morning. My only point is that, *if* Haig were intractable, I believe we could still deal with the situation. The one vital thing is, since there must be a change, that we should be able once for all to get free to do what we know to be right.

Yours very sincerely,

MILNER."

As it turned out, the letter underestimated the formidable difficulties to be encountered here and in France when it came to overruling the opposition of the military chiefs. In order to ease matters I proposed that Robertson should be our representative on the Board of Control. This involved his vacating the position of C.I.G.S. In that event it was proposed that Sir Henry Wilson should be appointed to that post.

Sir Douglas Haig came over on the 9th and I had an interview with him and the Secretary of State for War on the situation. I

wrote Milner the following letter which gives my impressions of that interview at the time:—

“9th February, 1918.

My dear Milner,

I have had an afternoon of it with Haig and Derby. Haig was quite reasonable. He did not quite like H. W. coming here, and thought the Army might be very shocked; but he said that was a matter for the Government. In fact, his attitude was perfectly correct. Derby, Haig and Macpherson thought that to make Robertson Deputy would be to humiliate him, and they thought it quite unnecessary in view of the fact that Wilson was made the Chief Adviser of the Government. Subject to that, the document was signed by Derby, and he is to see the King later on about it.

Wully is to be told to-morrow by Macpherson, who is motoring over to Eastbourne to communicate the news to him. Derby is delighted with our change of plans; and as we had only the choice of three or four doubtful second bests, I am firmly convinced that this is the best of them.

Ever sincerely,

D. LLOYD GEORGE.”

But although at that date Haig seems to have professed his readiness to stand honourably by the Versailles agreement to which he was a party, Robertson was not in the least propitiated. The *Globe* article was a clear indication that a formidable conspiracy was being worked up and that forces had already been gathered with a view to making a serious political attack on the Government in Parliament. Robertson and his friends meant this time to fight to a finish, and they had every hope of being able to build up a Parliamentary combination drawn from all parties which would reverse the Versailles decision, supplant the Government, and substitute for it one which would make Robertson virtual dictator for the rest of the War, as Hindenburg was in Germany and by the same means.

The next step of this clique, in its reckless disregard of the interests of the nation in a Great War, transcends anything for which—fortunately—there is any precedent in any war ever waged by this country. The conspirators decided to publish the war plans of the Allies for the coming German offensive. Let it be borne in mind that these war plans were not amateur schemes sketched out by presumptuous politicians and forced on unwilling and horrified soldiers. They were prepared by a body of able and experienced Generals—one of them acknowledged to be far and away the greatest military brain and leader thrown up by the Allies. There was no politician present at the meetings of the military members of the



Supreme War Council which initiated and worked out these plans. They were then further considered and discussed at a gathering where the two Commanders-in-Chief and Sir William Robertson were present, and there they were adopted unanimously. Haig and Pétain were there and never dissented. On the 11th February there appeared in the *Morning Post* a long article signed by Colonel Repington in which the proposal to set up a General Reserve under the command of General Foch was completely revealed to friend and foe alike. The article was headed:—

“THE WAR COUNCIL.

PARIS DISCUSSIONS.

REMARKABLE REPORTS.”

It began by asseverating that:—

“... Prime Ministers and others have recently resolved themselves into a Council of War, have rivalled it in strategy, and have exclusively occupied themselves in teaching soldiers how and where to make war.”

As I have already pointed out, I was not present at the meetings of the Military Representatives of the Supreme War Council where these plans in the first instance were formulated, nor was any civilian representative there. Foch would be the last man to submit to any dictation on questions of strategy from any one, and certainly not from any civilian. He stood up to the redoubtable Clemenceau, who was his civilian chief, and that needed some courage.

But the essence of the article comes when under the heading of “A New Decision” Colonel Repington disclosed the military plan for countering the impending German attack. This is how he defends his treachery:—

“... Newspapers have been strictly enjoined not to refer to one of the chief results of the Council. In this way it is hoped that criticism will be burked. But there are times when we must take our courage in both hands and risk consequences. One of the decisions taken is against all sound principles and can only breed confusion in a defensive campaign such as that to which we are restricted at present. . . .”

He then proceeds to give away the whole scheme: the Reserve of manœuvre—its functions—the body set up to control it—the name of the President; and he emphasises the salient feature of the project, that it is to be independent of the two Commanders-in-Chief. There is a passage which shows that the inspiring motive of this malignant

and treasonable article was not so much hatred of any particular politician—although Milner and I came in for special denunciation—but jealousy of authority conferred upon another set of Generals held up to contempt as “the Versailles soldiers.”

“ . . . At present it is the duty of the Commander of the General Staff to issue the orders of the War Cabinet to the Armies. But now there interposes the Versailles soldiers, under the Presidency of General Foch, and the British General on this body is not apparently under the War Office, nor was he appointed by them. He owes his elevation to Mr. Lloyd George's favour alone. . . . ”

The head and front of the “Versailles soldiers” was Foch, the greatest soldier of the War, and General Weygand, one of the ablest Staff officers produced by the War. With all respect for Sir William Robertson's admirable qualifications, he had not commanded in any of the battles fought in the War. In fact he had never been in action. His right-hand man and the architect of his downfall, Sir Frederick Maurice, was as comfortably placed as any politician in a Department at the War Office when the worst fighting of the War by the British Army began, and there he remained up to the hour of his dismissal. This invaluable piece of information as to the Allied plan of campaign was passed on to the Germans by partisans in a quarrel between rival Generals.

Repington, having exposed his real aim and motive, then incited the Army Council to an act of insubordination against the Government:—

“ . . . The Army Council will, I hope, make a firm and united stand in the interests of the rest of the Army, and will make the position perfectly clear. Everybody has to go ‘over the top’ sooner or later in this War, and it may now be the Army Council's turn.”

Which of the men on the Army Council had ever been “over the top” in this War? The article ends by saying that “this is the situation which Parliament must clear up in such a manner as it thinks best.” The Army having given the cue by rebelling against authority, Parliament was then “to do its bit.”

Repington did not only disclose to the enemy the existence of the General Reserve, and its mechanism, but the entire plans of the Allies for the year. They were embodied in Resolutions which provided that the Allies would stand on the defensive in France, and resist the German attack with the scheme of the General Reserve, and that Allenby should take the offensive in Palestine. Repington's article does not disclose in a general way the discussions of the Supreme War Council and its decisions; he speaks with minute precision. He quotes from the very English text of the Minutes of

the proceedings: he uses my own words as recorded then, "the delivery of a knock-out blow to Turkey." We had discussed Allenby's difficulty, and this discussion is in the Minutes. The words of the Minutes reappear in the *Morning Post* article: "How long will it take for our broad-gauge railway" to advance? No one could doubt that Repington had seen the text of the Minutes of the proceedings of the Supreme War Council, and (it will be noted) the English text. In fact, Repington admits it: on February 4th, 1918, being in Paris, he wrote in his diary: —

"This morning there is published an official and completely fantastic *compte rendu* of the proceedings of the War Council. . . . It tells absolutely nothing of the decisions taken."

He could not know this (which was, of course, true) unless he had seen the text of the Minutes and of the Resolutions.

I know nothing comparable to this betrayal in the whole of our history. It was immediately appreciated in Germany. The *Morning Post* article appeared on 11th February; Professor Delbrück, the famous German authority on military and strategic questions, expressed his thanks for it in the issue of his magazine\* of February 24th. He worked in close connection with the General Staff, and the information was evidently conveyed to him by the Intelligence Section.

Repington's betrayal might, and ought to have, decided the War. Professor Delbrück was one of the chief witnesses before the Commission of the Reichstag which later was to investigate the causes of the catastrophe of 1918 and his views, set out in writing, were virtually adopted by the Commission. These views are to be found at rather greater length in a book of his.† He pays me the compliment of saying that my plan for the Allies—a defensive in France and an offensive side-show elsewhere, would also have been the best plan for Germany to pursue, and, in terms, states that "Lloyd George, the civilian, appreciated the military experiences of the first four years better than Ludendorff."‡ Repington's disclosures, as he points out, enabled the German High Command to execute such a plan in perfect security. For it informed the German High Command that the Allies were not to take the offensive in France, and so enabled German divisions to be moved elsewhere from France without any risk. Delbrück was a Nationalist in politics and highly patriotic: great as were Repington's services to Germany, yet Delbrück is shocked by its perfidy, and applies the word "treason" (*Landesverrat*) to it.§

\* The *Preussische Jahrbuch*.

† "Ludendorff's Selbstporträt."

‡ *ibid.*, p. 52.

§ *ibid.*, p. 55.



This extraordinary effusion of Repington's was given prominence in the columns of the *Morning Post* and the benediction of a leading article. Had it appeared in the *Daily Herald* or the *Forward* or any other Socialist journal, we should have been constantly reminded in every political conflict waged since, how the Socialists betrayed secret information of great military value to the enemy at the most critical stage of the War.

Entries in the Repington Diaries show that this was not an indiscretion due to the impulse of an individual but that it was the first move in a concerted attack on a very wide front.

Here is an extract: —

"Saturday, 9th February. Met Gwynne at the Bath Club. We compared notes and experiences. After I had told him what I had learned, he told me that there was a big row on here, and that he hoped the Army Council were all going to stand firm. Asquith has stated that he will speak on the debate on the Address next Tuesday, and Gwynne and I agreed that I should write and expose the Paris proceedings either Monday or Tuesday. Gwynne is going to see Derby and try to hearten him up, and is all for fighting this matter out."

Great pressure from many quarters was brought to bear on Lord Derby to join the conspirators. They were under the impression that they had captured his sympathies and they were profoundly disappointed when subsequently he failed to follow their fortunes. I am convinced that they were not justified in relying upon his co-operation. There was soon evidence that the ramifications were not confined to one party. A body calling itself the Unionist War Committee in the Commons "passed strong resolutions warmly condemning the attacks on the Generals." These resolutions were brought to me by Lord Salisbury. I challenged him to point to one attack which I had made or encouraged on the Generals. Whatever I might think of them personally, I knew the importance of not undermining public confidence in them as long as they held their positions. The moment the Army lost their belief in their leaders they could not be expected any longer to face the horrors of the battlefield or to endure the chronic discomfort of the trenches. The mutiny in the French Army had taught us what might be expected from troops that had ceased to trust their Generals. At home I knew that such a feeling would spread the unrest. I therefore went so far as to take no steps to correct the impression of resounding victories created by false or incomplete reports from the front and in all my public utterances I referred in eulogistic terms to Haig personally. My only public criticism, was directed to the lack of co-ordination between the Allied Armies. It is one of the greatest difficulties

encountered by statesmen who have the supreme responsibility of directing the resources of a country in a war and are held accountable to public opinion for failure, that they cannot always openly state the facts as they know them until the conflict is over. And the necessity of pouring glowing panegyrics on Generals who did not merit the praise lavished on them, made it less easy—indeed almost impossible—to correct their calamitous errors. All this I pointed out to my critics at this time. But nothing availed. The train had been laid and I knew that when Parliament met it would be fired. The powder for the assailants was supplied from the War Office.

The treachery of the *Morning Post* was considered at a meeting of the Cabinet held on the day of the publication. The War Cabinet recognised that:—

“The article appeared to give valuable military information to the enemy, and constituted a definite breach of Regulation 18 of the Defence of the Realm Regulations, and also a defiance of the decision of the War Cabinet, as to the undesirability of any reference being made in British newspapers regarding the formation or command of a General Inter-Allied Reserve.”

As a proof that Lord Derby was not implicated in these intrigues, I have a note taken at the time which showed that he denounced the article in question as clearly of a most mischievous character. He believed that it had been written from Paris, and said that it was clear that Colonel Repington had become acquainted with information of a secret and confidential character which had now been made public by the Editor of the *Morning Post*. Whether the plans were improperly revealed to Repington in London or Paris, they ought never to have been made public.

The Director of Military Intelligence stated that he had understood the article in question had been submitted to the Press Bureau on the previous evening. The Press Bureau had communicated with him, and Sir Edward Cook had informed him that he had told the Editor that the article infringed Regulation 18 under the Defence of the Realm Act, and ignored the special request issued to the Press on the 4th February.\*

Sir Edward Cook read to the War Cabinet portions of the article in its original form as first submitted to the Press Bureau. He said he had endeavoured to censor it, but its whole character was such that amendment was practically impossible. He had accordingly returned it to Mr. Gwynne with a letter conveying the warning above described. In spite of this fact, the article had appeared in a slightly amended form.

I pointed out that this was not the first occasion on which Colonel

\* Press Bureau, Serial D.621.

Repington had written articles for publication which were of the utmost value to the enemy. Further, in connection with the Cabinet inquiries regarding the man-power situation, Colonel Repington had written articles, published by the *Morning Post*, containing figures regarding our strength and reserves. In fact Repington in his diaries boasts of these feats: he writes on January 24th, 1918: "My article exposing the failure of the War Cabinet to maintain the Army came out in the *Morning Post* to-day without going to the Press Bureau and caused much excitement." Also an article damaging to British interests had been sent by him for publication in America.

It was decided to consult the Solicitor-General and the Director of Public Prosecutions. In the subsequent discussion, the Solicitor-General called attention to the fact that the Supreme Council at Versailles had on the 6th February passed a Resolution on the subject of the danger of Press revelations of the plans adopted at the recent Meeting. This Resolution said:—

"The Military Representatives wish respectfully to draw the attention of the Governments represented on the Supreme War Council to the undesirability for military reasons, of any public discussion in the Press or otherwise of the arrangements now being taken in hand for the creation and employment of an Inter-Allied General Reserve."

It was urged that unless action was taken in a case such as this against a wealthy and prominent London newspaper, it would be quite impossible to take proceedings if necessary against smaller Labour newspapers in future.

The difficulty we experienced was in framing the charge in such a way as to make it impossible to give further publicity to the actual plans agreed upon at Versailles. Any implication that the article contained a disclosure of the real character of the Versailles scheme would in itself aggravate the mischief. The charge had therefore to be confined to a breach of one of the Regulations of the Defence of the Realm. The culprits thus escaped with a fine.

Repington published with pride a letter he received after his conviction from Sir William Robertson, in the course of which this General Officer, who but recently held the most exalted office in the British Army, writes to a person who has been convicted of publishing the secret plans of the Allied Armies, condoling with him on the greatness of his sacrifice, and assures him that they had both done what was best for the country. No wonder he adds, "I am heartily sick of the whole sordid business of the past month"—Sordid indeed!

It did not end with the publication of the details of the Allied military plans in the Press. A concerted effort was made to secure



even more details and fuller and more authentic publicity in Parliament. No prosecution would lie against a Minister who was forced by Parliamentary pressure to furnish information.

Parliament met on the 12th February. It had been conveyed to me that Asquith as Leader of the Opposition would interrogate me as to recent events. But I was unable to ascertain through the recognised channels of communication what questions were to be put to me, although I endeavoured to do so. I was told that Asquith was out of town and would not be back before the meeting of the House. I mention this fact because something turns on it. I informed his Deputy, Mr. Reginald M'Kenna, that I was prepared to give Mr. Asquith personally and privately the information he sought as to the Versailles decisions but that I could not do so in public for obvious reasons. I received no reply to this communication. Mr. Asquith made no allusion to it in his speech and proceeded to demand a public revelation of what had occurred in reference to the Reserves. I had therefore to inform the House of the offer I had made.

Asquith, with the skill of the practised debater, opened the attack with a glowing eulogy on the "two great soldiers," Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson. "There are no two men in the whole of Europe whose military judgment I would more unhesitatingly accept." The fight against the Government was to be presented in the form of an issue between Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson on the one hand and myself on the other. It was a dexterous move. He meant to use the popularity of these two distinguished soldiers as a weapon with which to slay the Government. He then proceeded to cross-examine me as to the Versailles decision. He disclaimed any desire to seek information as to the result of the deliberations of the Conference so far as they related to military and strategic operations. But he wanted to know in what respect the Allied Governments had departed from their promise not to confer any executive authority on the Supreme Council, and what were the new functions and new duties undertaken by the Council. This is exactly what I proposed to give him in private had he responded to my invitation. But it must have been obvious to him—for he must have been fully informed on the subject by the General Staff with whom he was in touch—that I could not reveal the executive functions given to the Board without also disclosing the strategic purpose we had in view of the creation of a General Reserve and the way in which it would work in the battle. And I could not give information to the House as to the extent to which our decision affected the powers either of the Chief of the General Staff or the Commander-in-Chief without entering fully into details as to the working of our plan and the constitution of the Board that would exercise the control.

At the time I was suffering from a severe cold with a temperature, but I felt that only one who had attended the deliberations of the Allied statesmen and Generals could deal with the situation. I replied to Asquith:—

“ My Rt. Hon. friend asked me a question with regard to the Versailles Conference, and he seemed to think that it was possible to answer without giving away any information as to the conduct of our actual military operations. There is no use giving partial information, and I think that if he reflects—even from the indications which he has seen as to the character of the decisions there—he will find that it is impossible to make any statement to the House as to the decisions which were taken without giving information as to the plans of the Allies. . . . ”

I pointed out how the situation had changed since November owing to the certainty that Russia had withdrawn from the War and that, in spite of pledges given by her to the contrary to the Russians, Germany was withdrawing troops from that frontier in order to attack us in the West:—

“ That was the situation with which we were confronted at Versailles. Up to this year, there was no attack which the Germans could bring to bear upon either our Army or the French Army which could not, in the main, be dealt with by the reserves of each individual Army. The situation is completely changed by the enormous reinforcements brought from the East to the West; and the Allied representatives at Versailles had to consider the best method of dealing with the situation, which was a completely different one from any situation with which they had been previously confronted. They had to deal with a situation where it may be necessary—where it is absolutely essential—that the whole strength of the Allied Armies—France, Great Britain, Italy and America—should be made available for the point at which the attack comes. Where will the blow come? Will it come here or there? Who can tell? All you know is that it is preparing. They have got a gigantic railway system behind which they may swing troops here or there. It is essential that arrangements should be made by which the Allies shall treat their Armies as one, to meet the danger and menace wherever it comes.

That was the problem with which we were confronted at Versailles. If we had not dealt with it, we should have been guilty of a gross dereliction of duty. What happened there? In the old Conferences to which I have been accustomed military members met together, and when the civilian members met, the military members came with a written document saying what they had decided. I do not mind saying that at such a Conference, to

discuss strategy was a pure farce. But here you had, for purposes of decisions, civilian members and military members sitting together for four or five days. The Commanders-in-Chief were there, the Chiefs of the Staffs, the military representatives of the Supreme Council and the Prime Ministers of the three countries, and other Ministers as well. The military members took part just as freely as the civilian members in the discussions, and there was an interchange of views during the whole of the time. And let me say that, as the result, complete unanimity was reached. There was not a division of opinion upon any resolution that was ultimately come to."

I then referred to the Repington disclosures:—

"With regard to this critical action which is involved in the extension of the Versailles powers, I must speak with caution, because I am talking about military decisions in the War Council. I wish there had been someone in Germany, or in Austria, whose ears were glued to the keyhole, when the War Council of Austria and Germany sat, and that he had published their decisions in the newspapers! The man who had done that and could tell us what arrangements the Austrians and the Germans had together come to, in order to co-ordinate most effectually their plans to attack our forces, would be worth many army corps to the Allies.

When I talk about the War Council and its decisions I have to do so with caution, because if information is given to the enemy, I had rather the responsibility were on other shoulders than mine. . . . There are millions of gallant lives depending upon it, the honour of the State, the safety of our native land depends upon it—these great war aims, upon which the future of the world depends, turn upon it. To give away information which would imperil these is treason beyond description, and I decline to participate in it. It is enough for me to say that the decisions come to there were come to unanimously. We have to consider the best methods of carrying them out."

I begged Asquith:—

". . . not to press the Government to give information which any intelligence officer on the other side would gladly pay large sums of money to get, as to the arrangements which this country and the Allies have made for countering that great blow."

Mr. Asquith resented the implication that he was asking for information of that kind. I replied that I felt certain he had no wish to do so, but that I wanted him to realise that if I were to give the information to the House it would also be giving it to the enemy.



I reminded him that I had offered to convey to him personally in confidence the whole of the Versailles decisions. I continued:—

“ . . . When you are conducting a war, there are questions which a Government must decide. The House of Commons, if it is not satisfied, has in my judgment but one way of dealing with the situation; it can change that Government. But to try and discuss military decisions—

MR. ASQUITH: I made no such request.

THE PRIME MINISTER: Believe me, this is a military decision. Does my right hon. friend know what it means? I say it is a military decision—a military decision of the first magnitude—and a military decision where some of the greatest soldiers of the Allies were present and to which they contributed.

MR. G. LAMBERT: Did Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson approve these decisions?

THE PRIME MINISTER: Certainly; they were present there, and all those representatives approved. I could carry it further with regard to that. (HON. MEMBERS: No, No! and an HON. MEMBER: Do not be drawn!) It is very difficult under these circumstances, because the House must realise that I am anxious not to give information which would be of the slightest help to the enemy. There is only one way when we go to councils of war—you must leave it to those who are there to decide, and if you have no confidence in them, whether they be military or whether they be civil, there is only one way, and that is to change them. But to go on and discuss these matters in the newspapers, whether on one side or the other—and if you begin discussing them on one side you are bound to have discussion on the other—makes war direction impossible—absolutely impossible!”

In conclusion I made an appeal to the House and to the Press:—

“ . . . I have been fighting hard against these paragraphs appearing in the Press. There is nothing that makes the work of government more difficult than discussions of strategical questions going on in the Press, and I appeal to the House of Commons, and I appeal outside the House of Commons to those who are interested in seeing this War conducted efficiently, to prevent discussions of this kind going on. If the House of Commons and the country are not satisfied with the conduct of the War, and if they think there is any Government which can conduct it better, then it is their business, in God's name, to put that other Government in! But as long as the House of Commons retains its confidence in the Government, then I say it ought to allow the Government a full and free hand in the direction of the War.”

For all practical purposes this concluded the debate. The House was clearly satisfied with the explanation given.

I was hopeful that after the full discussion in the House and the failure of the opposition to make any case that stirred sentiment either in or out of the House against the Versailles decisions, Sir William Robertson would see the wisdom of reconciling himself to the situation. I was anxious not to complicate matters by dismissing Generals. Robertson had won confidence as an administrator which was fully justified both by his organisation as Quartermaster-General in France and by the way he pulled things together at the War Office. But he also had built up for himself a reputation as a great strategist which was not justified by any achievement in the studies of peace-time or in the active planning of war-time. He had thus acquired a fame in the popular estimation far beyond anything his record would warrant. There had been much praise but no criticism. In war open detraction of Generals is deprecated—on the other hand, laudation, however extravagant, is encouraged. This method gives confidence to the Army at the front and to the public at home. Any public suggestion that the Army leaders are unfit or untrustworthy would demoralise the troops. This necessity places statesmen at a considerable disadvantage in their dealings with the military chiefs. I could not have published my memorandum on Passchendaele or pointed out how its predictions had been fulfilled. Had I overridden him without publishing my full reasons I should have been told I was interfering in matters for which I was not qualified by experience or training to express an opinion, and that I was setting aside the judgment of men to whom I and others had induced millions to entrust their lives. In France, in Germany, in Italy, in Russia, as well as in our own country, it had been a source of almost insuperable difficulty in securing the best leadership for the Army. In Germany, where Generals could point to a dazzling array of great victories in every battlefield, they acquired such authority that they dominated the Government in matters exclusively within the sphere of Ministers. In France, Joffre almost achieved that influence during the first years of the War. No doubt Robertson had been persuaded by the sycophants, whom great power without criticism always breeds, that he could establish a similar dictatorship in this country, and that this was his opportunity. He made up his mind to challenge a definite conclusion with the War Cabinet. He was convinced that the Government had lost whatever popularity it had ever acquired—that the nation would welcome a change—that there were forces in Parliament, drawn from every Party, strong enough to effect a coup—and that the issue between generals and politicians was well chosen. Robertson therefore dug in his stubborn toes. He refused the offer of a position on the Board of Control if it involved his surrender of the position

of C.I.G.S. He insisted that the Chief of the Staff should be *ex officio* member with power to appoint a deputy when he was unable to attend.

I was determined that the military representative at Versailles should not be a mere mouthpiece or instrument of the Chief of the Staff, just a deputy who could not go beyond limited instructions sent him from England by a chief who had not heard the argument or even the proposals to be debated. That would have been a farce. Robertson would have probably sent there the subservient and rather unbalanced Frederick Maurice, one of those foolish devotees who bring the idols they worship to their downfall. This intention is recorded in Wilson's Diaries.\* Maurice would have done just what he was told and no more. He did not possess the independence or the judgment which would have given to his chief the impartial information and good counsel which would have enabled him to form a sound opinion. From any point of view there could not have been a poorer choice. The Cabinet therefore presented Robertson with the alternative of either going there himself or remaining as C.I.G.S. at the War Office. In either case we made it clear that the Versailles nominee must meet his Allied coadjutors on equal terms and therefore must be free and unfettered. Robertson refused the nomination and challenged the whole Versailles decision.

During these critical days the chill I had contracted laid me up and I was unable to attend the Cabinet. I saw my colleagues in my room, especially Mr. Bonar Law, Lord Milner and Mr. Balfour. The last was reluctant to let Robertson go, and felt certain that a good deal of his attitude was due to pique and a thorough dislike of Sir Henry Wilson, whom he suspected to be the alternative nomination. I told Balfour that if he could persuade Robertson to be reasonable I had no desire to have a rupture with him. He promised to interview him. Here is his account of the conversation, which he sent me at the time:—

“ Foreign Office,  
15th February, 1918.

NOTES OF A CONVERSATION WHICH I HAD WITH THE C.I.G.S.  
ON THURSDAY, 14TH FEBRUARY, 1918, AT 3.30 P.M.

By request of the Cabinet, I went to see General Robertson yesterday afternoon, in order if possible to persuade him either to retain the position of Chief of the Staff on its traditional lines; or, if he preferred it, to take the post of Military Member of the Allied War Council at Versailles.

I pointed out to him that the Government gave him the alternative of accepting either of the two great Staff appointments

\* Major-General Caldwell: "Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson," Vol. II, p. 22.



connected with the conduct of the War on the Western Front. It seemed to me that they could do no more, and that, on public grounds, he ought to accept.

General Robertson observed, repeatedly and with great insistence, that the fact of his having been offered whichever of the two posts he preferred had, in his view, nothing to do with the question. If his objection had merely been that the powers now given to the Council at Versailles, and therefore to the British Member of it, overshadowed the position of the C.I.G.S., it might have conceivably been worth while to transfer his activities from London to Versailles. But this was not his point of view at all. He objected to the new system,\* and he equally objected to it whether he was expected to take a share in working it as C.I.G.S. or to take a share in working it as Military Member of the Supreme War Council. An objectionable object in the middle of a table (to use his own metaphor) was equally objectionable from whichever end of the table you looked at it.

I did my best to persuade him that the responsibility of refusing a great position at the most critical moment of the War was one which he was hardly justified in taking. Extreme cases might be conceived, in which the machine to be worked was so obviously fated to break down that no man could be required to undertake the duty of working it. But it seemed to me impossible to say this of the present plan. Doubtless every scheme for introducing some measure of unity into the working of four different armies under four different Commanders-in-Chief and four different General Staffs, belonging to four different nations, was open to objection, and holes could easily be picked in it. The Germans had, and must continue to have, an advantage over the Allies in the matter of unity of command. But it seemed to me, though I had nothing to do with the contrivance of the Versailles plan, that, with a little goodwill, it could be made to work smoothly and efficiently; and that, if this were so, I thought he should consider it his duty to work the plan.

We discussed the matter on these lines for over half an hour. I regret to say with no result at all.

General Robertson was very anxious that the scheme should be so modified that the Military Member at Versailles should be the subordinate and representative of the C.I.G.S. In that case he would be quite ready either to retain the position of Chief of the Staff or go to Versailles.

I had, however, no commission from the Cabinet to discuss a scheme which had, I gathered, already been rejected at the late Conference, nor indeed was I qualified to do so.

A. J. B."

\* He had approved of it in his speech at Versailles.

On that Memorandum it was evident to the Cabinet that they were up against a graver issue even than the one raised by the Versailles decision. It was now a question whether the Government of the day should submit to military dictation on a matter where they were by every constitutional precedent the supreme authority. The Inter-Allied Governments, including ours, were all represented at Versailles: their principal military advisers were also present. The decision taken there received the unanimous assent of both the civilian and military representatives of all the Allied nations. Even if the British Government had desired to alter the decision, they could not have done so without reopening the question with their Allies. A debate had taken place in Parliament on this very issue and the action of the Government was not challenged in the Division Lobby. Now an eminent and highly placed soldier, who was present at the Versailles Conference and acquiesced in the plan, took upon himself the responsibility of brushing it on one side. If the Government surrendered, then a military dictatorship would have been an accomplished fact. The Government of the day would have been as impotent in the face of protests or vetoes or orders issued by Robertson here as the German Chancellor and his Ministers had become after July, 1916, when confronted by the peremptory messages of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. We were bound to take a stand at the risk of much misunderstanding and the chance of a Parliamentary defeat. The War Cabinet were unanimous. There were, however, influential Ministers outside the Cabinet who gave trouble, and at least two threatened to resign. One of them—and he was by no means the least influential—actually placed his resignation in my hands. The situation for the moment seemed precarious. Nevertheless, we determined to stand or fall by the Versailles decision.

When Robertson refused to continue as C.I.G.S. on the terms we offered, he in effect resigned. The Cabinet therefore took steps to find a successor. It was not an easy matter. The obvious person for the post was Sir Henry Wilson. But like all men of brilliant gifts and marked personality he had not only fervent admirers but implacable opponents—in the Army. Professional officers were sharply divided into these two schools. The men at the top were strongly anti-Wilson. Some actively disliked him: most of them distrusted him. Both schools were right. He possessed intellectual gifts which justified admiration. But he also had attributes which explained and, to a large extent, gave warrant for the suspicion and lack of confidence so widely felt in him. He was whimsical almost to the point of buffoonery. He answered a serious question or expounded a grave problem in a vein of facetious and droll frivolity which was undignified in a man of his grave responsibilities. Habitually he jested over questions of life and death. This habit detracted from

the weight and authority which his position and capacity ought to have given to his counsel. He had undoubtedly the nimblest intelligence amongst the soldiers of high degree. He had also a lucidity of mind and therefore of expression which was given to none of his professional rivals. It was a delight to hear him unravel and expound a military problem. For that reason he was specially helpful in council of civilians. But he had no power of decision. That is why he failed in the field. For the same reason he was not a complete success in council. He shrank from the responsibility of the final word, even in advice. I was always perplexed to know what to think of him. His friends had an extravagant opinion of his ability. They credited him with genius of a high order. I had been taught to suspect him, but only for political reasons. I was conscious of these prejudices and of their origin and was thus on guard against them. For that reason I discounted too much all my instinctive doubts about him. I always felt that the views of politicians about his merits or demerits had no reference to his military qualifications. They were formed from motives of political association and were therefore not impartial. Asquith hated him for his implication in the Curragh mutiny. For the same reason he was an undoubted favourite with Bonar Law, Milner and Carson. But neither Asquith nor the Unionist leaders judged him fairly as a soldier. They were much too prejudiced either for him or against him on partisan grounds. I did my best always during the War to discard political bias in my choice of men for service in any capacity. I did not think Wilson the ideal man for the post, but he was much the best brain I had met in the upper ranks of our professional army and he did this country a memorable service: from the beginning he appreciated the genius of Foch, which was by no means perceived even by the French General Staff. His was the only military mind—French or English—subtle enough to understand the subtlety of Foch's genius.

However, I realised that the fact of this highly controverted and controverting personality being in the background of the discussion complicated the issue. Wilson was the living embodiment of the Versailles idea. He was partly responsible for it. This was generally known. For that reason a large number of Liberals whom in ordinary circumstances I could have relied upon to fight against military dictatorship in any shape or form swung right behind the military clique. And so did the Irish. What an ironical situation! The Liberals, who in 1914 fought an attempt at a military overlordship engineered by Wilson, now, because of their hatred of his intrigue, backed up a more dangerous conspiracy to establish a military dictator. On the other hand, the instigator and organiser of the effort of the soldiers in 1914 to override Parliament had become, only four years later, the champion and the standard bearer of the



resistance of the Government of the day to a similar conspiracy. But I have seen these paradoxical situations so often in politics that they have long ago ceased to surprise me.

I am bound, however, to acknowledge that the friendship, amounting to affection, with which Wilson was regarded by powerful members of the War Cabinet helped to win their adhesion to the change at the War Office. Balfour, Derby and Robert Cecil were not of the number. They inclined the other way. But with Balfour, his interview with Robertson settled him. The other two were still recalcitrant, or rather one was hesitant and the other definitely captious. In the circumstances I thought it desirable to offer the post of C.I.G.S. to a soldier who commanded the respect and confidence of the whole Army without distinction of rank and of the nation without reference to party. I therefore first of all offered it to Plumer, who was then in command of the British Army on the Italian Front. I had consulted Haldane, who knew the Army well, and he had warned me against Plumer. He was fully alive to his fighting qualities, but thought little of his intelligence. He considered him quite unfitted for the duties of Chief of the Staff. Plumer, however, settled the matter by declining the post. He made it clear that his sympathies were with Robertson. I am not sure whether he decided on merits or out of personal loyalty. The Cabinet, therefore, fell back on Wilson. There was no other obvious alternative.

Haig and Derby came over on Sunday, the 17th February, to see me at my cottage at Walton Heath. We discussed the whole position for hours. Haig put up no fight for Robertson. He clearly did not approve of his defiance of a decision come to by the Government. I thought it right to inform him that Derby had placed his resignation in my hands. I was under the impression that he had a great regard and respect for his civilian chief. I was anxious to find out at once whether that would affect his attitude. I was surprised to discover that, so far from the news disturbing him, he sniffed it aside with an expression of contempt. He had a poor opinion of Derby's stalwartness, and did not hesitate to show it. Haig himself had no intention of resigning and gave no indication that he was not prepared to accept the Versailles decision. He pointed out that as it was now becoming evident that the German attack would be on the British Front it would not be possible to take any of his reserves away from that front. I assured him that I felt confident Foch was fully aware of that fact and would not contemplate the folly of sending away troops to a sector which was not threatened. He expressed himself as being quite satisfied with that assurance. He never then objected to the plan by which the General Reserve would be placed under the command of Foch. Wilson saw Haig that evening at his house at Kingston and Haig told him that: "All

these quarrels had nothing to do with him, and that he was prepared to accept whatever was decided by the Cabinet, and then play up all he could."

When Haig left me, Derby remained behind to place his resignation in my hands for the third time during the past 24 hours. This time he insisted that it was irrevocable. He explained that he did not do so because of any disagreement with the line taken by the Cabinet, but out of loyalty to the men with whom he had worked at the War Office. And he told me his decision was final. As soon, therefore, as he left I got on the telephone to Bonar Law and we agreed that the vacant Secretaryship of State should be offered—subject to the King's consent—to Austen Chamberlain. He was out of town at the time, but he motored to London at Bonar Law's request. Before, however, he reached Downing Street, Ian Macpherson, the Under-Secretary for the War Office, called at 11, Downing Street to inform Bonar Law that he had succeeded in persuading Derby to withdraw his resignation! The following day Bonar Law reported the appointment of Henry Wilson to the Cabinet and it was approved by them without a single protest. But the struggle was by no means over.

Letters appeared in the Press which showed that the issue was to be fought out in Parliament, and the line upon which it was to be fought was indicated very definitely in the critical journals. As one of them put it:—

"The House of Commons, as representing the nation, has got to choose between the two men, Mr. Lloyd George and Sir William Robertson, and to choose between them with regard to a military question. That is the true issue. No one can be at one and the same time on the side of the Prime Minister and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. (Sir William Robertson has told us that he has not resigned.)"

I decided to make a statement in the House of Commons on the 19th. I quote two or three extracts from that statement:—

"The Government were extremely anxious to retain the services of Sir William Robertson as Chief of Staff as long as that was compatible with the policy on which they had decided, in common with the Allied Governments, after prolonged consultation at Versailles. It is a matter of the deepest regret to the Government that it was found to be incompatible with that policy to retain the services of so distinguished a soldier. If the policy be right, no personalities should stand in the way of its execution, however valuable, however important, however distinguished. If the policy be wrong, no personalities and no Government ought to stand in the way of its being instantly defeated.

What is the policy? I have already explained to the House. . . . It is not merely the policy of this Government. It is the policy of the great Allied Governments in council. There is absolutely no difference between our policy and the policy of France, Italy and America in this respect. In fact, some of the conclusions to which we came at Versailles were the result of very powerful representations made by the representatives of other Governments, notably the American Government. That policy is a policy which is based on the assumption that the Allies hitherto have suffered through lack of concerted and co-ordinated effort. There was a very remarkable quotation in yesterday's *Manchester Guardian* which, if the House will permit me, I will read, because I think it gives the pith of the whole controversy:—

‘Some great soldier once said that to find the real effective strength of an alliance you must halve its nominal resources to allow for the effect of divided counsels and dispersed effort.’

Our purpose and our policy has been to get rid of that halving of the resources of the Allies, so that, instead of dispersion of effort, there should be concentration and unity of effort. There is a saying attributed to a very distinguished living French statesman, which is rather cynical, that—

‘The more he knows of this War, the less convinced he is that Napoleon was a great soldier, for the simple reason that Napoleon had only to fight coalitions all his life.’”

I then recapitulated the effect of the Versailles proposals, and I gave my reason for the final decision of the Versailles Supreme War Council not to appoint the Chiefs of the Staff as members of the Board controlling the Reserves and for according to them an independent position:—

“... Nobody could tell where a decision would have to be taken. The men who take the decision ought to be within half an hour's reach. Eight hours, ten hours might be fatal. We felt it was essential that whatever body you set up should be a body of men who were there at least within half an hour of the time when the Council would have to sit, in order to take a decision. Nobody knows what movement the Germans may make. There may be a sudden move here or there, and preconceived plans may be completely shattered by some movement taken by the enemy. Therefore, it was essential that the body to decide should be a body sitting continuously in session.

The third reason was this: Not merely have they to take decision instantly, but they ought to be there continually sitting together comparing notes, and discussing developments from day



to day, because a situation which appears like this to-day may be absolutely changed to-morrow. You may have a decision in London, and telegraph it over to Versailles, but by the time it reaches there you may have a complete change in the whole situation. Therefore, we felt it was essential that these men should be sitting together, so that whatever change in the situation took place they could compare notes, discuss the thing together, and be able to come to a decision, each helping the other to arrive at that decision. . . .

If the Chiefs of the Staff sat in Paris, it meant that the Governments would be deprived for long periods of their principal military advisers, at a critical time, and at a time when action on other vital matters on other fronts might be required. Therefore I have no hesitation in saying that the moment it comes to be examined—although we examined it with the greatest predisposition in its favour—it was found to be absolutely unworkable for the simple reason that the moment the Chief of the Staff went to Paris, he would cease to be the chief military adviser of the Government, and either Versailles would have to be satisfied with a deputy who could not act without instructions, or the Government would have to be satisfied with a deputy who was not their full military adviser. For that reason, the Supreme Council rejected that proposal with complete unanimity. I think I am right in saying that the proposals were withdrawn. It was felt even by those who put them forward that, at any rate, without very complete changes, those proposals were not workable.

Then it was suggested by the French Prime Minister that it would be desirable for each national delegation to think out some other plan for itself, and to bring it there to the next meeting, and that was done. It is very remarkable that, meeting separately and considering the matter quite independently, we each came there with exactly the same proposal the following morning, and that proposal is the one which now holds the field. I hesitated for some time as to whether I should not read to the House the very cogent document submitted by the American delegation, which put the case for the present proposal. It is one of the most powerful documents—I think my right hon. friends who have had the advantage of reading it will agree with me—one of the ablest documents ever submitted to a military conference, in which they urged the present course, and gave grounds for it. . . .”

I also once more emphasised the fact that the Generals were present and took part in the discussion:—

“ Sir William Robertson was present, and nothing was then said or indicated to me that Sir William Robertson regarded the plan as either unworkable or dangerous.”

(This statement was never challenged by Sir William Robertson or his friends.)

I then informed the House of the interview, I had with Sir Douglas Haig: —

“ I was specially anxious that the Commander-in-Chief, who is more directly concerned in the matter than even the Chief of Staff, because it affected operations, perhaps, primarily in France, should be satisfied that the arrangements that were made would be workable as far as he was concerned. Therefore, before I arrived at this arrangement, I invited him to come over here. I had a talk with him, and he said that he was prepared to work under this arrangement.”

I then recapitulated the alternative offers made to Sir William Robertson and his refusal of both the Versailles post and the position of C.I.G.S. under the new arrangement.

“ We had to take the decision, and it was a very painful decision, of having to choose between the policy deliberately arrived at unanimously by the representatives of the Allied Powers, in the presence of their military advisers, and of retaining the services of a very distinguished and a very valued public servant.”

I paid a warm tribute to his capacity, his character and his attractive personality.

I added that: —

“ During the whole of the two or three years I had been associated with him, our personal relations had been not merely friendly, but cordial, and that even at the final interview, where I did my best to urge Sir William Robertson to take one or other of the alternatives offered to him, we parted with expressions of great kindness.”

I then dwelt upon the difficulties, not merely practical difficulties, but difficulties due to national sentiment and historical traditions, in the way of securing co-operation between Allies. I ended on a personal note: —

“ . . . I ask the House to consider this: We are faced with terrible realities. Let us see what is the position. The enemy have rejected, in language which was quoted here the other day from the Kaiser, the most moderate terms ever put forward, terms couched in such moderate language that the whole of civilisation accepted them as reasonable. Why has he done it? It is obvious.

He is clearly convinced that the Russian collapse puts it within his power to achieve a military victory, and to impose Prussian dominance by force upon Europe. That is what we are confronted with, and I do beg this House, when you are confronted with that, to close down all controversy and to close our ranks.

If this policy, deliberately adopted by the representatives of the great Allied countries in Paris, does not commend itself to the House, turn it down quickly and put in a Government who will go and say they will not accept it. But it must be another Government. But do not let us keep the controversy alive. The Government are entitled to know, and I say so respectfully, to know to-night whether the House of Commons and the nation wish that the Government should proceed upon a policy deliberately arrived at, with a view to organising our forces to meet the onset of the foe. For my part—and I should only like to say one personal word—during the time I have held this position, I have endeavoured to discharge its terrible functions to the utmost limits of my capacity and strength. If the House of Commons to-night repudiates the policy for which I am responsible, and on which I believe the saving of this country depends, I shall quit office with but one regret—that is, that I have not had greater strength and greater ability to place at the disposal of my native land in the gravest hour of its danger.”

In reply, Asquith was unexpectedly mild, and it was evident that the advertised parliamentary challenge to our action would not materialise on this occasion. He was still distrustful of arrangements which would subordinate the British Army to Allied control, but he said:—

“I do not ask the House—for though I have every respect for it, I do not think we are an adequate tribunal to determine matters of this kind—I do not ask the House to pronounce its opinion one way or the other on this question; but I am sure the Government realise that they are taking upon themselves a great responsibility in discarding, on a question of that kind, a system which has been devised with the greatest strategical and technical authority.”

Sir William Robertson left the War Office and took up the Eastern Command. His place was taken by Sir Henry Wilson. It is characteristic of Wilson's selfishness and ingratitude that the only comment he makes in his diary on the night of his appointment by me to the chief position in the Army was that it had been delayed for 11 days owing to my indecision. Eleven days spent in anxious conferences, in fighting through his policy and his promotion amongst Ministers and on the floor of the House of Commons!



Invariably to me personally he was effusive. Behind my back he was abusive. One can understand the imputation of treachery which was associated with his name, and which, by the entries of his diary, he has done his best to justify.

After these Parliamentary and Cabinet discussions, the interviews with Haig and the change in the War Office, the crisis was over. The Versailles decisions had been accepted by Parliament and by public opinion and we were prepared to go forward with their execution. Why then were they not carried out? One reason was the time lost in these distracting controversies. The other was the change in the attitude of the French Government.

Priceless weeks had been wasted. A great deal of the energy and nerve of the Government had been consumed in an internecine struggle, which did not contribute in the least to the effective prosecution of the campaign. On the contrary, it took our attention away from matters of vital importance which required constant vigilance and supervision. The consequent delay and distraction had a great deal to do with the failure of the project to organise a General Reserve in time for the German offensive. There is nothing more absorbing or wearing than a prolonged parliamentary or Ministerial crisis. In peace it is the inevitable price of democratic government. Even then it hinders progress. In war, it engenders calamity. It is no use underrating the gravity of the crisis and treating it as if it were only a question of whether one set or another of politicians should sit in Downing Street. It was above all an issue as to whether the Government of the day as the sole representative of the national authority vested in King and Parliament should still be supreme in the exercise of its legitimate functions or whether the power should pass into the hands of the War Office. Had the conspirators won, the next Government would have been practically their creation and the Ministers their creatures. No Ministry, having our fate before their eyes, would have dared to challenge any decree issued by the General Staff. Least of all could you expect independence of judgment in a Ministry composed of the men who had got into power on the cry of "Trust the Two Generals" in preference to trusting a Council representing the statesmen and soldiers of all the Allies.

But that was not the only peril with which we were confronted in this unpleasant conflict. It looked at one time as if the national unity might be put in jeopardy on the worst issue that could be debated during the War—the merits or demerits of rival Generals and of competitive strategical plans. The discussion actually began in the Press—it continued in Parliament—on those lines. In the course of such a discussion much was revealed which helped the enemy. If it had continued much longer, more and more intelligence would have leaked out. I declined to enter into that discussion, but if the Government had fallen and a War Office Cabinet had been

substituted for the War Cabinet, then bitter controversy would have developed, and it would have been difficult to restrain one set of partisans in defending their decisions against attack, from inadvertently following the example already set by the others. From this danger Haig's refusal to join the intrigue helped to save the nation by the correct and patriotic attitude he assumed. He took his stand on the constitutional position that it was for the War Cabinet to decide and that it was the business of the soldiers to accept their decision and to act upon it. Had he stood by this position to the end what a difference it would have made to the course of events in the spring offensive!

Robertson alone, without the glamour of Haig's prestige, was not powerful enough to overturn Ministers. Had we been faced with the resignation of both, the struggle would have been harder and the issue more doubtful. It was a misfortune to the British Army that Haig did not in the ensuing week continue to follow the fine example of constitutional loyalty he himself had set on this occasion. His failure to do so on the question of the General Reserve was disastrous in the event. But the main responsibility for his subsequent conduct is attributable to the encouragement he received from the departure of Pétain and Clemenceau from the decisions of Versailles.

## CHAPTER LXXVII

### BEFORE THE OFFENSIVE

BEFORE I tell the story of the doom of the General Reserve I propose to give a sketch of the military situation in France at the date of the distracting and futile discussions which I have already related. A great enemy offensive on the Western Front was now an assured prospect. Division after division was hurried up from Russia to the West, and there was every indication of great preparations for an attack. The Germans, by every artifice in the disposition of their reserves and material, managed for some time to conceal the direction and point of their onslaught. Haig did not believe in an offensive on a large scale. His view, expressed to the War Cabinet on January 7th, was that the Germans would "attempt to destroy the morale of the enemy peoples by attacks of limited scope, such as against Châlons, Arras or some salient." The latter seemed to him to be the more probable course for the enemy to adopt, because an offensive on a large scale made with the object of piercing the front and reaching Calais or Paris, for instance, would be very costly. Another reason assigned by him for doubting an attack on a grand scale with the object of breaking our line has a considerable bearing on the discussion about the disposition of British man-power. He said:—

"Moreover the German man-power situation did not seem very satisfactory."

Although Haig subsequently altered his opinion as to the purpose of the German attack and came to the conclusion that the Germans would attempt to force a decision, he still held to his original idea that the attack would not be on a wide front, but that there would be limited offensives, a punch here, and a blow there on both the French as well as the British Fronts. Even on 16th February, when Haig held a conference of his Generals at Doullens, and gave to them his appreciation of the situation, "he thought the main effort would be against the French, and that the indications from the British Front showed no signs of an imminent attack." I agree with General Gough that "it is not easy to understand how the Commander-in-Chief arrived at some of his



conclusions, because at that very conference Brigadier-General Cox, the new Chief of the Intelligence Section of G.H.Q., estimated that out of the 68 German Divisions in reserve, 50 were on the British Front. He expected an attack in or before March." In spite of this information from his own Intelligence Section, Haig adhered to his own prediction. He only changed his mind on the subject three or four weeks before the attack, when it became abundantly clear from the immensity of the German preparations opposite our lines that the attack was coming there and on a scale unparalleled by any offensive on either side during the War. Even up to the last, G.H.Q. refused to believe that the attack would cover the Fifth Army Front.

Pétain, like Haig, had also come to the conclusion that the German attack would be on both fronts simultaneously: two on the French and one on the British; and he, misled as the Germans hoped he would be by the preparations staged on his front, held to that opinion even after the attack of the 21st March. He distributed his reserves on that assumption, many of them at the remote southern end of his front; and his subsequent reluctance to part with his reserve divisions was due to the conviction that the German attack on the French Front would come as soon as he had thrown his reserves into the Somme battle. The French High Command was haunted by the fear of an offensive through Switzerland, like the offensive through Belgium of 1914. This operated to our disadvantage, for the French were piled up at the end of the line furthest from us.

Ludendorff had decided that his first attack must be on the British Front and that it must be on a colossal scale with a view to shattering the Third and Fifth Armies and turning the whole British line. The weather is too uncertain in Flanders for any operations in the early spring. The further south the area of the offensive, the earlier could it be launched. Hindenburg said the idea of an attack in the Flanders and Lys area was set aside because up to the middle of April the country in that quarter was an impassable swamp. When the Germans were induced by the exceptional dryness of the spring to begin their attack on the plain of the Lys in the second week of April, their progress was retarded by the morassy condition of the ground. Now the submarines were failing to prevent the steady arrival of American troops; thus the German High Command realised the importance of forcing a decision at the earliest possible date, and they could not postpone their first blow beyond March. If they succeeded in their aim of smashing the British Army in the spring, the American troops arriving in the summer would be too late to retrieve the Allied position. It was a shrewd effort to make the best of a situation which was growing increasingly precarious for the Central Powers. Their man-power was at the

point of exhaustion, and there was no reservoir upon which they could draw. For them there was no America providing an untapped source of millions of virile young men of the best fighting qualities. Their food situation was becoming increasingly serious. Their allies were sagging, and every German statesman and soldier knew that neither Austria, Turkey nor Bulgaria could be relied upon if the strain continued much longer. It is not creditable to our Intelligence organisation that we did not appreciate how the allies of Germany were gradually disintegrating. If the War Office had any secret information on the point they carefully withheld it from the War Cabinet and it played no part in the strategical plans of the High Command. They did not wish to give us any encouragement to direct any part of our forces to the task of finishing off the tottering confederates of our greatest foe. For that reason they always exaggerated grossly the numbers of the Turks and the prowess of the Bulgarians, and they certainly gave us no idea of the dejection and demoralisation that prevailed in Austria. But the Germans were under no delusion as to the real position. Their allies might be kept up leaning in their trenches with a rifle on the parapet for another year, but no longer. Hindenburg in his biographical notes shows how much these considerations were responsible for the March offensive:—

“Even though at the end of 1917 I considered that there was nothing to make me doubt the ability of us Germans to continue our resistance through the coming year, I could not conceal from myself the regrettable decay of the powers of resistance of our allies. We must devote all our resources to secure a victorious conclusion of the War. That was the more or less expressed demand of all our allies.”\*

An early decision—and the earlier the better—was imperative if the Entente were to be forced into a satisfactory peace. That decided Ludendorff in favour of an attack on the only part of the British line where owing to weather conditions operations in March were practicable. A further inducement was the fact that at this point the defences were in an unsatisfactory condition and the line was weakly held. Ludendorff's final decisions were arrived at on the 21st January. He then definitely settled on the plan which was put into operation on March 21st. All preparations were to be ready by March 10th.

It is interesting now to know that Ludendorff's ablest Staff officer, Colonel Wetzell, advised an attack on the French in preference to the British Front. His reasons are flattering to the British soldier, although not complimentary to their leaders.

\* Marshal von Hindenburg: “Out of My Life,” p. 340.

His first reason was that—

“we have a strategically clumsy, tactically rigid, but tough enemy in front of us.”

He went on—

“The French have shown us what they can do. They are just as skilful in the tactical use of their artillery as of their infantry. Their use of ground in the attack is just as good as in the defence. The French are better in the attack and more skilful in the defence, but are not such good stayers as the British.”

He also said that on this part of the front—

“the British infantry is very fully equipped with machine-guns, etc.”

I hope my military critics may one day find not only the space but also the grace to give one line of acknowledgment to the fact that the plenitude of machine-guns, etc., was due to action taken by a civilian against the advice of Generals.

The Germans evidently thought little of our military leaders but they had a wholesome respect for the tenacious valour of the officers and men who held the British lines in front of them. And although Colonel Wetzell thought the French more skilful strategically and tactically, they were not considered to be as good stickers as the men whom he alludes to further on as “the obstinate British.” Wetzell was very right when he thought it a mistake to rely on breaking through a line held by British soldiers! They do not retreat with sufficient celerity to guarantee that an attack will reach its objective before the reserves arrive, even when those reserves are delayed by misunderstanding and muddle. The battle of the 21st March completely vindicated Wetzell's insight and foresight. He counselled an attack to pinch out Verdun because if it succeeded it would strike a deadly blow against the French. He did not preclude the possibility of a complete military collapse of the French Army.

He makes a point which has a decided bearing on the difficulties we subsequently experienced in extricating reserves from the north. He points out that we were “strategically tied in Flanders.” How true that was will become more and more apparent as the story develops. Wetzell was doubtless thinking partly of the Channel Ports. But in addition, we were far too much committed to the Passchendaele salient. We could not spare the necessary troops from the defence of an unthreatened sector to save from destruction the very Fifth Army that won it, for what it was worth, at an appalling cost.

The “Versailles soldiers” were of opinion that the first attack would be on the British Front and that the Germans would mass an enormous striking force with a view to breaking through on a wide



front in the Arras area. But wherever the attack ultimately came there was no difference of opinion that a great German offensive was contemplated and that the Allies had to make every preparation within the limit of their resources to meet it. It was generally agreed that everything must be done to repel the attack and hold the line until the Americans arrived in sufficient numbers to give the Allies that superiority in men which would enable them to take the offensive.

At this stage I do not propose to discuss the comparative strength of the rival armies. I deal with it in another chapter. It was at one time a subject of hot controversy, and so much heat remains in the cinders of that dispute that it is not easy to handle the subject. The evidence placed before the German Reichstag Committee that inquired into the responsibility for the March, 1918, offensive stated the position as being "a slight superiority in numbers" for the Germans, but inferiority in guns; that meant, if you accept Haig's estimate as to the lost morale of the Germans, a definite German inferiority in fighting strength. This fact may account for the complete absence of panic or even acute apprehension in Allied military circles before the battle. All were confident of the result or at least complacent about it. The only thing necessary to repel an attack on a fortified position defended by an army as strong as the assailants was that the defenders should make the best use of their positions and of their forces.

What were the requisites of defensive preparation?

Firstly, to put our defences in order: not merely the front line, but the battle zone, which had to be held at all costs if we were driven out of our front trenches—and then a further defensive system in the rear of the battle zone where we could fall back if the enemy succeeded in penetrating our second line of entrenchments.

Secondly, that the best use should be made of all the troops available by a rearrangement of the whole of our forces from Ypres to the Somme. The troops ought to have been so distributed that the part of the line which was known to be threatened should have an adequate defensive force both as to the numbers in the line and reserves behind. It was imperative that our strength should be economised and fully utilised by withdrawing divisions from indefensible salients, the holding of which was not essential to the defence of the line as a whole. It was very difficult to find enough men for all the war services of the Empire: this judicious rearrangement was a paramount consideration.

Thirdly, we were bound to secure the advantage of a single united front by means of the creation of a Central Inter-Allied Reserve disposed under a central direction and in suitable areas. Thus the Allied Reserves would be available to aid a hard-pressed sector wherever it was.

Fourthly, also to send from England every man that was needed to strengthen the line in France and to raise and train every available man that could be spared from our depleted resources of man-power but without disregarding the demands of other equally essential services.

Fifthly, to make arrangements for bringing to France from Egypt without delay all the British troops in the three divisions which were to be filled with Indian troops and to bring either British or Italian divisions from the Italian Front.

I propose now to examine how those responsible for directing the defensive preparations discharged their responsibilities. Take first of all the putting in order of the defensive positions on our front. Between June, 1916, and early December, 1917, the British Army had been engaged in offensive operations on a great scale. In the course of these battles, all the available labour in the British Army was concentrated on preparations for an advance.

This involved the employment of an enormous number of men in the making and repairing of roads, railways, new aerodromes, hutments and structures of all kinds. One can judge the additional strain which these demands put upon our man-power by quoting one figure—the labour forces in our army in France increased from 80,524 in January, 1917, to 302,904 in December, 1917. Of these, only 98,574 were coloured. As a consequence partly of the fighting, and partly of the baffling German withdrawal which Hindenburg so skilfully executed in March, 1917, in order to shorten the line and thereby increase his reserves, our front line had to be brought forward and our battle zone defences had to be reorganised. On the Somme and the Scarpe, at Vimy, Messines and Passchendaele, the close of 1917 saw us with a new front line. The thoughts of Headquarters were, however, so completely concentrated on the Flemish offensive that the preparation of new defensive lines was to a very large extent neglected on our front. In the area handed over to us by the French, the French front line was in fairly good condition, but behind that line the defences were negligible. General Gough says that the French had handed over part of their defences to the owners of the soil, who had filled in the trenches and ploughed over them. At the time, the British Army was engaged in offensive operations which demanded the energies practically of the whole of its available engineering and labour strength. Haig had hardly at his disposal a sufficient number of men to strengthen his new positions in the Passchendaele and Flesquières salients and at the same time to reorganise the defences of the line taken over from the French. He had therefore to choose the sectors on which he would concentrate most of his engineers and his labour battalions. He clearly ought to have devoted his first attention to the sector which was the most likely to be first attacked. For climatic reasons an offensive in upper

Flanders was unlikely and well-nigh impossible until April whilst an attack on the Somme was a feasible operation a month earlier. That consideration never seems to have occurred to him. He pressed on with his Passchendaele defences with all his available resources as if an attack were imminent, whilst he attended in a leisurely fashion to the sector doomed to an early assault on an overwhelming scale. The Army occupying the sector to the south of Amiens, that was to be attacked with such overwhelming force in March, was made up of survivors of the tired and exhausted troops. Their strength and their spirit had been worn out in the muddy battlefields of Flanders. Even in numbers they were weaker than those which he allocated to the defence of any other part of his line. Both in engineers and in labour his greatest activity was directed to the strengthening of the defences of the Passchendaele salient. A month after he took over the French line, there were only 626 labourers allocated to the preparation of the defences of the Fifth Army. At the end of another month there were only 3,120. A report which had reached me on the subject caused a communication to G.H.Q. in France from the Cabinet on the labour deficiency in the area of Fifth Army. This had the effect of inducing them to send a stronger contingent; but by March 16th there were only 8,830 labourers actually working on trenches and machine-gun positions and wiring in the battle zone.

A comparison of the number of engineering companies in the Passchendaele sector and that defended by the Third and Fifth Armies, just before the battle, will give an idea of the attention which our Headquarters gave to the defences of the two sectors respectively.

Sixty-eight R.E. Companies and Units were allocated to the Second Army for a front of 23 miles. The First Army was given 56 for its 33 miles; the Third Army, 54 companies for its 28 miles; and the Fifth Army, where the defences stood most in need of restoration and improvement, 56 companies for its 42 miles. That meant 3 companies to every mile in the Passchendaele area;  $1\frac{3}{4}$  companies to the adjoining Army. The threatened Third Army was given 2 companies per mile, but the Fifth Army had only  $1\frac{1}{3}$  companies per mile of its menaced line. That is, the Fifth Army, whose defences were in the worst state of all, was given to repair its deficiencies, even when it was evident that a great attack was coming on that part of the front, less than half of the assistance allotted to the Passchendaele Army where there was no great concentration of German troops to indicate an imminent attack. The result was that when the attack came, the defences were found to be utterly inadequate either to offer resistance or to delay the German masses. This will be evident from an extract from a report sent by G.H.Q. to the War Office on March 12, 1918, which states that:—



"the forward and battle zones were partially wired, and a beginning had been made towards preparing certain localities for defence, but the rest of the main line of defences, in the rear zone was only spit-locked.\*"†

General Edmonds, the compiler of the Official History, who was sent by the Engineer-in-Chief on March 14th, a week before the great battle, with Brigadier-General H. Biddulph, R.E., to report on the Fifth Army defences, "found that the front line only of the rear zone was marked out by a continuous ribbon of trench, seven feet wide and a foot deep, with occasional small belts of wire (tactical wire sited for sweeping by machine-guns; protective wire was to follow later). The sites for machine-guns and strong points were marked by notice boards."† These were the defences which had been prepared in the event of a break-through of the forward line for defending a retreating army against overwhelming numbers.

This description of the lamentable condition of the line which the shattered and now neglected Fifth Army were doomed to defend is corroborated by General Gough in his story of what happened before and during the battle. So much for the first requisite.

Now for the second requisite. What about the disposition made of the British troops to meet the impending blow? Whatever Haig's anticipations might have been in January and the first fortnight or three weeks of February as to the direction and strength of the German offensive, by the end of February there ought to have been no doubt even in his obdurate mind as to the part of the front against which the attack would be launched nor as to the scale upon which it would be made. By the end of February and the first week in March the evidence of German preparations opposite the Third and Fifth Armies had accumulated to such an extent as to make it certain that the thrust was to be aimed at that sector of the line and that it would come soon and suddenly. Immense masses of troops, guns and material were gathered in that area. New aerodromes had been erected. Huge dumps of ammunition could be seen. New roads and railways were being constructed to feed the attack with the necessary supplies for a costly offensive. Hospitals were put up. Where the Germans had had one army in front of the Arras-St. Quentin line there were now three. All these obvious preparations for an offensive on an immense scale were made opposite the Third and Fifth Armies. Strong corroboration was supplied by our discovery through our Intelligence Service that Von Hutier, the conqueror of Riga, had been brought over from Russia to command the troops opposite the Fifth Army. He had been Ludendorff's favoured choice for command whenever one of his great offensives in the East had to

\* Marked out on the surface with a pickaxe.

† "Official History, France and Belgium, 1918," Vol. I, p. 123.

† *ibid.*, p. 123.

be carried out. All this was known four weeks before the attack began.

Haig in his despatches writes:—

"... By the end of February, 1918, these preparations had become very marked opposite the front held by the Third and Fifth British Armies, and I considered it probable that the enemy would make his initial effort from the Sensée River southwards. As the 21st March approached it became certain that an attack on this sector was imminent, and counter-preparation was carried out nightly by our artillery on the threatened front."\*

In view of this fact the distribution of our troops at that date is incomprehensible. Including reserve divisions, there were on the Passchendaele sector—at the extreme left of the British Front where no attack was anticipated—14 divisions with 34 brigades of artillery and 25 siege batteries, not brigaded, allocated to defend an unthreatened line of 23 miles. The First Army immediately to the right of Passchendaele was not then menaced. Nevertheless it had 16 divisions with 29 brigades of artillery and 15 siege batteries not brigaded for a front of 33 miles. The tired and threatened Fifth Army had 14 divisions (plus three cavalry divisions, equal to one of infantry) with 46 brigades of artillery and 15 siege batteries not brigaded for a front of 42 miles ill-supplied as it was with defensive positions. The Third Army was a little better off in men and artillery but not as favoured as the Flanders Army. The Passchendaele sector had nearly one division for every one and a half miles of front it held: the Fifth Army, which G.H.Q. knew were about to bear the brunt of an attack more formidable than any yet staged in this War, were allowed one division for every three miles of front. In addition the Passchendaele sector had two or three times as much heavy artillery per mile in its support as the neglected Fifth Army. This is the treatment Haig accorded to the army that had at his bidding fought so valiantly for his impossible enterprise in Flanders. Eight divisions were holding the Passchendaele salient alone and another five divisions the Flesquières salient. Haig had in his December memorandum intimated to his subordinate Commanders that both these salients were indefensible and were to be abandoned in the event of a heavy attack. Yet when an attack of a magnitude such as he had never seen or contemplated was about to be hurled on the weakest part of his line and he was short of reserves to meet it, he practically immobilised 13 divisions of his best troops in these worthless and indefensible salients. Ultimately, as the battle developed, first the Flesquières and then the Passchendaele salients had to be abandoned, but only after great confusion had been caused and much damage had been inflicted on the British Army by the reckless and

\* "Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches," p. 182.

foolish decision to weaken our front at the point of danger, in order to hold these trophies of a blundering and blundered campaign.

Ludendorff, when trying to explain the weakness of our line at the point of attack—the faulty distribution of our troops—attributed it to the skill and care with which the attacking army had concealed their movements by night marches and other expedients. He boasts that the enemy had not discovered any of his vast preparations. He could not believe that our Commander knew what was coming, “otherwise his defensive measures would have been more effective and his reserves would have arrived more quickly.” He was very much mistaken. Captain Wright writes\*: “General Cox, of G.H.Q. Intelligence, not only gave the exact area of the attack (a portion of the German line which was lying hushed and motionless while the whole of the rest of it flared up with artillery raids and preparations) but tipped the exact date on 20th or 21st March.” In fact, as usual, everything worked to perfection in our Army except the minds of the Commanders. Hindenburg also, in his book, dwells on the way the British had distributed their forces, massing troops in Flanders and leaving the St. Quentin sector to be held weakly, also holding a salient at Flesquières which could be pinched out. He gives these dispositions as one of the reasons why the attack was made at the southern end of our line. He adds, “of course, it was always doubtful whether the English would keep their forces distributed in that way until our attack began.” He, like Ludendorff, can find no explanation for their doing so, except the skill displayed by the Germans in concealing their intentions. Had he known that Haig had been fully informed by the end of February of these intentions, he would have had to fall back on another explanation which he gives earlier in his book—that the “English methods were too rigid.” The English tacticians “did not understand how to meet rapid changes in the situation.” G.H.Q. had made their dispositions on another assumption. They required more than four weeks and several hard knocks on the head in order to change their minds.

Ludendorff was responsible for the withdrawal of the Germans from the Somme salient in 1917 in order to save troops. A great attack was coming on his front and he wanted to build up his reserves for the battle. He could not comprehend Generals wasting their troops in holding worthless ground whilst they were short of defenders for another part of the line threatened by a huge force.

Haig's action is unaccountable. History can recall many cases of men in great positions who have been known to do inexplicable things in a great emergency. It is true that he was very much annoyed with the French for depriving him of his last chance of continuing his cherished Flanders plan by forcing him to extend his line. He felt he had sufficiently done his duty by sending the Fifth Army to

\* Peter E. Wright: “At the Supreme War Council,” p. 125.



occupy their trenches. If these were attacked it was for Pétain and not for him to dispatch adequate reinforcements. What happened after the first day of the battle gives a certain colour to this explanation. After much searching and questioning I can find no other. But the underlying motive which dominated Haig's dispositions for the great battle was the fetter of Passchendaele. It is not surprising that Wetzell in his famous diagnosis of the situation in December, 1917, said repeatedly that the British Army was "strategically tied to Flanders" and that the French were more dangerous because they had no such strategic chain. One of the legs of the Army was stuck in the great quagmire and it could not march to its greatest need. The evil wrought by Passchendaele was not at an end. It was responsible for the loss, running to hundreds of thousands of trained officers and men at a time when both were badly needed. It wore out a splendid army to such an extent that they were too exhausted either to train for the coming battle or to prepare the necessary defences to fight it under conditions that would give them any chance of holding their own. It robbed them of the engineering and labour assistance which was necessary to enable them to put their defences in order. It left them without a sufficiency of troops to hold so long a line and it deprived them of the reserves which alone would have enabled them to check and counter-attack the enemy. Passchendaele was a festering sore which weakened the strength of the Army and diverted the attention urgently required for other weaknesses and defects in its system.

It is difficult to find any favourable explanation for Haig's extraordinary behaviour towards the Fifth Army. It was the remnant of the fine army which had served him with such inexhaustible courage in the greatest trial of endurance and valour to which any army had ever been subjected. It was led by a gallant officer who was an old friend of Sir Douglas Haig, and who had given to his chief an example of loyal and devoted obedience in the carrying out of plans in which he had ceased to have faith. In explanation of Haig's conduct it might be argued that no man carries out instructions of which he disapproves with the alacrity and zeal he displays when the orders commend themselves to his judgment. And constitutionally stubborn men such as Haig are apt to carry resentment so far into the realm of reluctance as to thwart and defeat the odious command and to punish with failure those who have issued it. We had already suffered from this temper in the early spring when every kind of tiresome question was raised to delay the Nivelle offensive. These delays were largely responsible for its defeat. Had the Government fallen in with Haig's plans for a resumption of the offensive in the spring of 1918, backed him through and through in his refusal to take up more line, sent him all the reinforcements he asked for, withdrawn divisions from the East and thus gathered together another immense

army to be thrown into the Passchendaele salient for another great push, there would have been in his preparations on the Flanders Front none of the fatal dawdling and tardiness which characterised his treatment of the problem of improving the defences of the poor abandoned Fifth Army in the Somme area. He would have found all the labour that was necessary to make the preparations, all the reserves required to support the attack. But this St. Quentin Front was not his concern. He had another and a better plan and the French and the British Governments had between them thrown it over, and substituted this arrangement which deprived him of the great part he had mapped out for himself. The responsibility was theirs and it was their business to see it through. He would just obey orders. The Fifth Army could take over that line and those who had declined to accept sound advice would see what happened when it was neglected! The obstinate mind with a grievance is an ill-balanced mind and finds it difficult to conform to conditions which have been forced upon it by others. There are plenty of historical illustrations in every sphere of responsibility, of greater men than Haig who failed to engage their full powers in enterprises of which they disapproved. In those cases resignation, or direct refusal, is the only reputable course and to that extent Sir William Robertson, when he had no faith in a scheme, played a more honourable part than Sir Douglas Haig.

In brief, the Fifth Army was not beaten through any deficiency of skill or courage on the part of its own officers or men, or through any lack of provision or proficiency in its own Commander, but through causes for which the General Headquarters of the Army were mainly responsible. When it was settled that the British Army had to take over that sector of the line it is not clear that G.H.Q. made any preliminary inspection of the state of its defences and communications; certainly they imposed no terms on the French that they should remedy the defects before the British took over. When it was taken over they did not furnish General Gough with the necessary means to undertake the task. They only supplied him with labour under pressure from the Government weeks after he had occupied the neglected area. Even then it was quite unequal to the minimum requirements. They gave him no reserves in the least adequate to the menace, and even when it was certain that an overwhelming blow was directed at that point, they moved no adequate reserves to his support. When the battle was joined and the Fifth Army was fighting a desperate rearguard action against forces which were three times as strong as its own, assistance was sent slowly and grudgingly. It was only late at night on the second day of the battle that G.H.Q. invited aid from the French. When it is also borne in mind that the British Commander-in-Chief declined to join in the formation of a General Reserve that would have averted the whole disaster, it is not difficult

to affix the responsibility for what occurred in the March offensive. This brings me to the third requisite I have mentioned.

It was not only essential that the British Army should have its troops distributed in such a way as to make the most effective use of its entire strength in the coming battle, but that the Allied Army as a whole should do so. This was not a limited offensive affecting one sector of the line; it was the beginning of a great battle in which the Germans aimed at destroying both the British and the French Armies in succession before the Americans started to count as a formidable force. First the British were to be attacked and crumpled up, then the French were to be broken and scattered. It was to be one vast battle lasting for weeks and fought from the coast to the Swiss borders. But whether the British or the French were to be dealt with first, it was essential that the reserves of both armies should be ready to be thrown in at any crisis of the battle. The Germans had not the necessary numbers to attack both armies simultaneously on that scale. They must therefore be assailed in turn. The German reserves were drawn from all parts of their line but they were concentrated mainly behind the sector of the next offensive and were thrown in under the direction of the Commander-in-Chief of the whole front. Prudence dictated that a similar course should be adopted by the Allies. That is why the War Cabinet gave their strong support to the idea of a General Reserve under a central authority not dependent on the apprehensions or sectional interests of the Commander of either army. It seemed to us to be the only practical and sensible arrangement short of the appointment of a Generalissimo, which no country and no army on either side was prepared at that date to accept. Strategy is not numbo-jumbo, as second-rate soldiers would wish us to believe, but the application of common sense and experience to military conditions and illuminated by a flash of imagination. As the latest (1935) edition of the Field Service Regulations rightly points out, "*Tactics on the battlefield are governed by certain simple, common-sense precepts, which are in the main very similar to those which govern everyday life. The ordinary citizen who is planning a business transaction goes through much the same steps as the Commander who is planning an operation.*" Haig rejected the plan of the General Reserve: perhaps it would be more correct to say he never even considered it. Once at Versailles the members of the British Staff played out for him, as a war game on a map, and very accurately, what they thought the forthcoming battle would be and also the way the General Reserve would operate. Haig disdained to accord to the exposition the courtesy of listening to it and sat ostentatiously reading his paper. Eminent soldiers had placed their training and experience at our disposal, and one of them at least, with a mind lit up with the lamp of genius, gave advice which seemed to us to be sound and recommended the General Reserve scheme. Once the battle commenced there was no time for



conference between the two Commanders-in-Chief to decide first all whether the occasion had arisen to throw in fresh divisions, and so, which should do it. Should Haig, for instance, move his la G.H.Q. reserve into the fight before Pétain drew on his? Haig and Pétain were both convinced that there would be a triple attack almost simultaneously—one on the British Front and two on the French. Haig reluctantly and tardily changed his mind a few days before the battle. Nevertheless, he did not move one of his reserve divisions from the unthreatened area nearer the battle areas. Pétain still held the opinion that the biggest effort of the Germans would come on his front and that the March offensive was launched in order to induce him to shift his reserves to the British Front and entangle them in that struggle. Haig in his despatch describing the battle and the preparations made for fighting it says:—

“ . . . In addition to our own defensive schemes, completion of arrangements for the closest possible co-operation with the French was recognised to be a matter of great importance and urgency. A comprehensive investigation was undertaken into the various problems connected with the co-operation of the two Allied forces. Plans were drawn up in combination with the French military authorities, *and were worked out in great detail to meet the different situations, which might arise on different parts of the Allied Front. Measures were taken to ensure the smooth and rapid execution of these plans.*”\*

Among the many problems studied by the Allied Staffs, those involved by a hostile offensive on the line of the Somme River and the passage of that river by the enemy had been worked out. The plans were applicable to such a situation, had been drawn up and were ready to be put into execution when required.”†

It is conceivable, although not intelligible, that Haig and Pétain may have been under the impression that they had established a workable understanding for mutual assistance; but how anyone with an actual knowledge of the facts could, after the event, have penned this amazing paragraph about plans for co-operation “worked out in great detail to meet the different situations,” and “ready to be put into execution when required,” passes my comprehension. Had Pétain failed to carry out his agreement? Haig pays him “a personal tribute for the ready and effective assistance he gave him in the battle. In fact, Pétain sent more divisions than were stipulated in the agreement, and sent them sooner. That fact, in the light of what happened, forms a grim comment on the efficiency of the agreement by which Haig set such store.

Both Pétain and Haig, when they were seeking to evade contributing to a General Reserve under Foch, assured their respective

\* My italics.

† “Sir Douglas Haig’s Despatches,” p. 180.

governments that they had made the most complete arrangements for coming to each other's aid, whichever was attacked. Pierrefeu, the brilliant French writer who was at Pétain's Headquarters during the battle and when preparations for it were being made, categorically denies this statement. He was a strong Pétainist and what he writes is therefore, not dictated by animus against the French Commander-in-Chief. This is his account of the so-called complete and detailed plans for co-operation between the two armies:—

"... Unity of front not having been realised, it had not been possible to conclude the precise agreement which, automatically, would have effected the collaboration of forces. In spite of the excellent and friendly relations which united us to the English, there was a wall between the two battle fronts."\*

When we come to what occurred during the fight it will be seen how accurate this description is of the looseness of the understanding reached by Haig and Pétain before a great battle which might have decided the fate of France. The agreement of February 22nd between the two Commanders-in-Chief did pass through the hands of Captain Wright, the Secretary of the Controlling Board. The following is an extract by him of the agreement made before the battle between Haig and Pétain. He had an opportunity of perusing it at the time.

"The agreement provides that they are to assist each other, but in one way, and one way only; the extreme French left met the extreme British right at Barisis, the point of junction of the two lines. Whichever of the two was attacked, the other, in case of need, agreed to help his colleague by extending his own line, but by extension only. The helper would thus relieve a certain number of his colleague's divisions who would be released for use elsewhere. . . . The exact dimensions this extension of either the French left or the British right was to take had to be left unfixed, and depended on the judgment and goodwill of the helper. Further Pétain . . . stipulated that he was only bound to extend his extreme left if we were attacked at a portion of our line other than our extreme right."†

It was an arrangement the most vital details of which were left to be thrashed out and decided after the emergency had arisen.

What had become of the General Reserve which was to be placed under an independent Board as an Army of Manœuvre to meet this emergency? It had been agreed to by the military as well as the political leaders of the Allies; the Commanders-in-Chief and the Chiefs of Staff of both the French and British Armies had accepted it. Pétain, Haig and Robertson had assented to it as well as Foch. No one

\* Jean de Pierrefeu: "G.Q.C." Vol. II, p. 127.

† Peter E. Wright: "At the Supreme War Council," p. 87.

would suggest that the great Generals simulated acquiescence in order to trick the political chiefs into a false belief that they had accepted the decisions and meant to abide by them. I would not dare to cast such an aspersion on their straightforwardness. They gave no indication at the Conference that they had any intention of acting upon its decisions. The statesmen left the details to be worked out by agreement between the Generals in the full confidence that they would honourably carry out a decision in which they had acquiesced. That trustfulness turned out to be a mistake. With our past experience of G.H.Q.'s we ought to have known that it was not enough to decide on the principle of a plan which, however obviously wise, was objectionable to them on personal grounds: it was necessary to determine the actual details. We were anxious to secure the goodwill of the Commanders-in-Chief for the project and get their wholehearted co-operation in working it out. By that means we hoped to save time and ensure that the scheme would work smoothly and well. We ought either to have remained at Versailles until we had a watertight plan which the Generals could not refuse to operate without a direct challenge of the authority of their respective Governments, or to have adjourned for a week or ten days and held another session to determine any differences there might be between the Commanders-in-Chief or between the Board and the Commanders-in-Chief. We realised when it was too late how little justified we were in trusting to the good faith and goodwill of men who hated an arrangement to which they had reluctantly agreed. They used every artifice of which the professional mind is capable to delay and by that means to defeat the project. They possessed the skill which is always attributed to a woman when she desires to frustrate an unpalatable wish expressed by her husband. She never commits the error of blunt refusal. She prefers to resort to procrastination. By that method she gets her way in nine cases out of ten. Repington attributes to his friend Sir William Robertson a saying which had reference to the Versailles decisions: "With these politicians the best thing to do is to gain time. All the Services understand the value of that advice when dealing with their political chiefs. One trouble makes you forget another and there are so many in a politician's life that the officials have ample opportunities for manoeuvre. In this case the trouble which took our attention for some time from the execution of the Versailles decision was caused by Robertson himself. Unfortunately for him, he was not only the source of the trouble, but its first victim. Still, the crisis he fomented incidentally served one of his main purposes—the postponement of the General Reserve until it was too late to act.

The Robertson episode had one unexpected repercussion which helped to kill the General Reserve. The Controlling Board, consisting of Generals Foch, Bliss, Cadorna and Wilson, agreed on February 6th as to the number of divisions that should compose the



reserve, and as to the numbers to be contributed by each army. It was estimated that for the moment a General Reserve of 30 Divisions would suffice. It was to consist of ten British, thirteen French and seven Italian divisions. A note embodying the decision of the Board was immediately sent to General Pétain and General Diaz. General Pétain's first reply, received on February 19th, stated that he could not allot more than eight divisions to the Reserve. Subsequently when it was too late to act, he stated that he had none at all to spare for a General Reserve.

There was curious delay in the dispatch of the note to Sir Douglas Haig. For some odd reason Sir Henry Wilson pocketed the document and said he would deliver it personally to Haig on the way to England. Wilson had been notified by his friends of the intention of Robertson to challenge the Government on the Versailles scheme, and he knew how it might end. Wilson was a shrewd politician. He also knew how it might affect his own career, and his ardent political supporters warned him to be on the spot to await the issue of the struggle. On it depended his chance of securing a glittering prize which he coveted above all others—the nearest position to that held by the Commander-in-Chief in his old Army days, but with the command of an army twenty times the size of the one he knew, and that in a world war. He was in too great a hurry to reach the scene of this fateful conflict to spend a night at G.H.Q. and he never thought of sending the note by another hand. He sent privately an unsigned copy of the letter to Sir Douglas Haig on February 8th, but either through policy or oversight held back the original. His mind was on something which excited him much more. In England he stayed watching with an avid but anxious heart the progress of the struggle between the I.G.S. and the War Cabinet. The official note was completely overlooked. When he remembered, or was reminded of it, he sent the official note on to Haig. During the time the Cabinet were fighting their way through the crisis Sir Henry Wilson never called their attention to the dangerous delays in the formation of the Reserve and to the intrigues that were going on to frustrate the plan together.

Haig only received his Official Memorandum from Versailles on the 27th February. Clemenceau paid a visit to Haig's Headquarters on the 26th February and subsequently told Poincaré that the English Commander-in-Chief had informed him that "he did not want to carry out the Versailles decisions." Haig seems to have also told Clemenceau that "he had already informed Lloyd George that he could never give up his reserve divisions to form a reserve army—that he would rather resign." He made an exception of the two British divisions returning from Italy. I have no note of any such conversation. I had only seen Haig on the 9th and the 17th February. The official Versailles Note on the reserves had not then reached him, although as I say he had been unofficially informed about its contents.

Had I been aware of his attitude I should most certainly have laid startling a fact before the Cabinet and I certainly would have imparted it to Milner, who was our civil representative on the Versailles Council. There is nothing in the War Cabinet Minutes on the point and the letters I received from Milner at this date contain no reference to it. Wilson notes in his Diary that on February 25th, Haig "flatly refused" to earmark any divisions for the General Reserve. But this refusal was not conveyed to me at the time. I have already recorded the only reference Haig made to the matter. That was in the conversation I had with him on the 17th. So far was he then from threatening to resign that Haig informed Wilson that his duty was to obey the orders of the Government, as it was for the Cabinet to decide. The conversation to which Clemenceau refers was never passed on to me.

Haig's reply was given on March 2nd. By that date there were unmistakable indications that the attack was coming on the British Front. The Cabinet received the official intimation of Haig's decision on the 6th March. In it he said:—

"... I have to make the following observations: An enemy offensive appears imminent on both the English and French Fronts. To meet this attack I have already disposed of all the troops at present under my command, and if I were to earmark six or seven divisions from these troops the whole of my plans and dispositions would have to be remodelled. This is clearly impossible, and I therefore regret that I am unable to comply with the suggestion conveyed in the Note."

(That is exactly what the course of the battle forced him to do.)  
He then added:—

"To meet any emergency in the Franco-British Front I have arranged as a preliminary measure with the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies for all preparations to be made for the rapid dispatch of a force of from six to eight British divisions with a proportionate amount of artillery and subsidiary services to his assistance. General Pétain has made similar arrangements for relief or intervention of French troops on the British Front. These arrangements, both French and British, are now being contemplated and zones of concentration opposite those fronts which are most vulnerable and likely to be attacked are being provided."

Subsequent events prove how vague, loose and dilatory these arrangements were when they were put to the test, and they had the fatal flaw that indefinite promises had to be interpreted not by the terms of an agreement, but by decisions taken at the time by two men whose views of the military situation, and to a certain extent whose interests, were in conflict.

The C.I.G.S. himself realised the danger of Haig's decision, for h

wrote on March 6th to the Secretary of State for War in the following terms:—

“S. of S.

I much regret the attitude taken up by the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief.

He admits, indeed he claims, that an enemy offensive is imminent on both the British and French Fronts, and yet either because he ‘foresees a wider employment, etc., of Allied Reserves than that foreshadowed in the Joint Note’—a remark which I confess I do not understand—or because he considers the General Reserve ‘could not be earmarked or located, etc. . . .’ which again I entirely fail to comprehend, seeing that every Reserve formation always is and always must be both earmarked and located—he declines to comply with the suggestion made to him by the Executive Committee at Versailles on the orders received from the Supreme Council.

Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig is taking a grave responsibility in so acting, for both the other Commanders-in-Chief (Generals Pétain and Diaz) have agreed to allot divisions—General Pétain giving eight and General Diaz six divisions. But apart from this, the Field-Marshal is taking a grave responsibility, because if he is heavily engaged and unable single-handed to withstand the attack, he will find himself living on the charity of the French Commander-in-Chief who may be unwilling or unable to help.

*At the same time, I am strongly of opinion that no pressure should be put on the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief at the present moment to make him conform to the action of our Allies.*

HENRY WILSON,

6th March, 1918.”

C.I.G.S.

This document was not communicated to the Cabinet at the time either by Sir Henry Wilson himself or by the Secretary of State to whom it was addressed. By writing to the Secretary of State, Wilson protected himself from the charge of condoning Haig's flagrant disobedience. By giving the advice to leave Haig alone, and omitting to communicate with the War Cabinet, he did in fact condone it: he thus retained the favour of Haig, which he always sought so zealously: at the same time he did not forfeit the favour of the War Cabinet, which he had gained so adroitly. In fact, he faced both ways, as usual. On March 6th I received from General Rawlinson, the head of the British Mission at Versailles, the following official intimation:—

“ . . . The Supreme War Council at its session of 2nd February, in presence of Commanders-in-Chief of French and British Armies and of Italian Minister of War decided upon creation of an Inter-Allied General Reserve and delegated to Executive War Board its



powers in all that concerned the constitution, the positions, and use of its reserve.

The Executive War Board in its sitting of 6th February drew up a joint letter to Commander-in-Chief making certain proposals with regard to constitution and position of the General Reserve.

By a written and verbal communication between General Foch and General Pétain an agreement with French Commander-in-Chief was reached on 19th February.

By a written communication between General Giardino and General Diaz an agreement with Italian Commander-in-Chief was reached on 2nd March.

In his letter of 2nd March the Field-Marshal Commander-in-Chief of the British Army states that he regrets that he is unable to comply with the request contained in the joint note of the Executive War Board.

Under the circumstances of the joint note the Executive finds itself unable to continue its work and therefore unable to organise the Inter-Allied General Reserve, as the Supreme War Council, at its sitting of 2nd February, had instructed it to do; and Joint Note of the Executive decides that each military representative shall so inform his own Government and ask for instructions."

It is evident from the terms of this resolution, that the Executive Board was still under the impression that Pétain stood by his offer of eight divisions. Sir Henry Wilson was also under the same impression. Foch and his colleagues had been kept as much in the dark as we were. They did not know Pétain's change of mind and how he was receiving not merely the acquiescence of Clemenceau but a considerable measure of encouragement from him in his obduracy. The Resolution passed by the Board indicated that in their opinion the scheme of a General Reserve had been destroyed by Haig's refusal and that in the absence of further instructions from their respective Governments it was useless to proceed any further with it. Had the Cabinet only had to deal with their own Commander-in-Chief the difficulty would have been overcome. But we were soon to ascertain that we had also to deal with two very formidable persons who were not amenable to persuasion, and to whom we could issue no instructions: the French Prime Minister and his Commander-in-Chief, General Pétain. The whole scheme had to be recast and re-conferred and re-argued. There was no time for all this. We had to make the best of a bad job.

Haig's refusal was discussed in the War Cabinet from the point of view of Haig's special difficulties now that it was known that the first impact of the German offensive would be on his line. We felt, however, that this was all the more reason why the French and the Italians should contribute their quota. The Italians at Versailles had shown every readiness to send even 11 divisions to France. Since then they

had reduced their offer to four. Haig, however, preferred to have two of his own divisions back. But the Italians, now that they knew the clouds were not gathering over the Julian Alps but above the fields of Picardy, would, we felt certain, release a few more divisions. We therefore suggested to Clemenceau that the Supreme Council should be summoned immediately to meet in London.

At this date we had not been informed that Pétain's attitude was equally recalcitrant and that he had threatened to resign rather than place his reserve under Foch. Nor had we been told that Clemenceau had also changed his mind and was no longer in favour of an army of manœuvre under Foch. The appointment of Foch seems to have been the reef on which the scheme was wrecked. Pétain would not submit to his command of the General Reserve. He felt it was a reflexion on his own authority if arrangements were made practically for putting the general conduct of a great battle under another General. I was informed subsequently that our G.H.Q. had a poor opinion of Foch and his capacity for such an exalted and responsible position. They did not conceal their contempt for the old soldier. A man who could explain himself clearly must necessarily be shallow and garrulous. To be able to speak lucidly and fluently was bad enough; but he also spoke dramatically. Foch was a Gascon by birth and Latin exuberance seems as much a sign of folly to the Anglo-Saxon as insular reserve seems a sign of stupidity to the Latin. He was just a stage Frenchman to be mimicked and laughed over. He was referred to in high military quarters as that "old dotard Foch." How brilliant soever had been his past career, they were convinced that his best work was done and, judging by the comments made in Staff circles, he was treated as a has-been with nothing left but a blustering manner which they thought deluded politicians into the belief that he was a strong man. It was only those mad and muddling politicians who would ever dream of putting the reserves of the British Army in a great battle under such a commander. It may be thought that I am giving a burlesque account of what happened behind the scenes to destroy the scheme of a General Reserve; but those who heard the conversations in elevated military circles about Foch will not be in the least surprised.

But most fatal of all Foch's critics—I might say adversaries—was Clemenceau. Foch was a devout Catholic. There were many nominal Catholics in high command in the French Army. But they never obtruded their attachment to the Roman Church on the attention of their associates. They were not even practising Catholics. The governing party in France was and had for a long time been anti-clerical. The threat to the existence of the Republic in the days of Boulanger and of the Dreyfus affair had come from the clericalists in the Army, trained in clerical schools, received and petted in clericalist society. Clemenceau was the most inexorable of all the anti-clericals.

His life had been spent in fighting the influence of the Church. He would never enter a church. His refusal when he paid a visit to Strasbourg after the Armistice to attend a celebration of the liberation of Alsace in that glorious cathedral lost him the presidentship of the Republic when he was the most popular and powerful man in France. Foch was not only himself an ardent Churchman, his brother was a bishop. Clemenceau had a deep distrust of all Catholic Generals. He disliked placing power in their hands. He never knew to what use they would turn their power. The spiritual antipathy between these two remarkable men developed in the course of the ensuing months into personal antagonism which was unpleasant to all those who took part in conferences with them. There is nothing more disagreeable in council than to witness the clashing hatreds of two strong personalities. The more Clemenceau pondered over the Versailles plan of a General Reserve under this clericalist soldier, the less he cared for it. There was another motive in explanation of Clemenceau's change of mind on the question of the General Reserve. Poincaré ascribes to Clemenceau the ambition of himself becoming the virtual Generalissimo of all the Allied Armies in every theatre of war.\* Poincaré and Clemenceau were mutually antipathetic. I would have hesitated to accept Poincaré's suspicions as to Clemenceau's motives when Clemenceau threw over the scheme which placed Foch in the powerful position of Controller of the Allied Reserves and I would not have thought these suspicions worthy of quotation, had it not been that they are confirmed by another witness of undoubted authority. General René Tournès, in his able and on the whole well-documented book on the 1918 campaign, says, in commenting on another conflict between the ideas of Foch and Pétain when Clemenceau intervened, that he was "swayed by a vague whim to wield the military command of the Coalition which he revealed almost as soon as he was in power."† This may explain the somewhat ill-natured observation made by

\* cf. for example, Clemenceau's words during a visit to Poincaré on February 22nd, 1918:—

"... We spoke of the difficulties which had arisen between Foch and Pétain. 'I shall settle that business,' he assured me, 'The organisation of the army of manœuvre is hardly defensible as it stands. *But I shall be there.* In the hour of attack I shall be on the spot. If there's a clash, I shall be the one to adjust it, provided I'm still in power.'"

(Raymond Poincaré: "Victoire et armistice 1918," p. 58), and again, Poincaré's account of Freycinet's opinion expressed on February 23rd, 1918:—

"... In the afternoon Freycinet arrived, still much preoccupied with the relations between Foch and Pétain, as well as the command of the Reserve Army. I told him that Clemenceau was certainly banking on acting as arbitrator in emergency. 'But,' he replied, 'Clemenceau cannot ever be sure of being there at the decisive moment. And besides, it's doubtful whether our Allies will leave the power of deciding the fate of an inter-Allied Army to a French politician.'"

(ibid., p. 60.) (My italics.)

† General René Tournès: "Foch et la victoire des Alliés" (Vol. IV of the "Histoire de la guerre mondiale"), p. 156.



Clemenceau to Foch immediately after the signature of the Doullens agreement: "Well, you've got the job you so much wanted!" There was a suspicion of pique in that comment, especially coming from the man who a few weeks before this incident had intimated his intention to get rid of Foch altogether. If Clemenceau ever harboured such an aspiration it would have inclined him towards Pétain rather than the dominating and dynamic Foch. Pétain shrank from bold decisions and would have been more disposed than Foch to leave the responsibility for taking them to the head of the Government. Whatever the motives that prompted Clemenceau's growing disinclination to confer supreme control on Foch, both Pétain and Haig soon realised its existence and took full advantage of it. Pétain was a cautious man—very cautious—so at first he confined his objection to an effort to cut down the contribution he had to make to the General Reserve. Why not eight divisions, instead of thirteen? That was all he could spare. But he gradually grew bolder when he saw that Clemenceau did not strike him down with the lightnings of his wrath. At last he mustered enough courage to resist the whole idea of parting with any of his divisions in order to place them under Foch's direction. Poincaré states that he threatened to resign if the Government insisted on his doing so. Clemenceau was easily won over. He told Poincaré on February 22nd (Memoirs) that "the organisation of a field army (i.e., an army of manœuvre) was not at all defensible in itself." By that date Clemenceau's prejudices and prepossessions had been roused and allied to the side of the Commanders-in-Chief who would not have Foch. When Clemenceau after his visit to Haig's G.H.Q. on the 26th repeated to the President what Haig had told him, he withheld from the Chief what he had told Haig. According to the Official History, Clemenceau told Haig that he gradually meant to *écarter* Foch. The two probably interchanged confidences about the distinguished but unwanted General and found that on this subject they were, from different motives, entirely in sympathy. At that interview the Reserve Army was finally put out of existence. Clemenceau called on Poincaré in the afternoon of his visit to Haig and told him that he had seen Pétain, who had again expressed his anxiety about the Reserve Army. Clemenceau said he had "reassured him." Then he added, "And for the rest events will arrange themselves. *The divisions of Versailles have ceased to be.*" It was after the "reassuring" talk with Pétain that Clemenceau visited Haig's Headquarters. When we bear that fact in mind we can understand better the character of the conversation that took place between Haig and Clemenceau. Haig knew then where he stood and that he could throw over the whole of the Versailles scheme without any fear of untoward happenings. Even the careful Pétain took a decision. On the 28th he reports to Poincaré that he is very satisfied with his conversation with Clemenceau. The reserve army *a vécu*." It was dead—but only for a short while, for a much

shorter while than anyone then anticipated. These conversations were not four weeks distant from the day—a day of muddle and of disaster—when the despised Foch was called by the united voices of the men—Clemenceau, Haig and Pétain—who had thrown over him and his plans as things of no worth, to save the Allies from the calamity into which they had blundered.

Not one of these vital conversations which Clemenceau had with Haig, Pétain and Poincaré was ever communicated to me or to any other member of the War Cabinet. I knew that Haig was obdurate and that Pétain was difficult, but I knew nothing of the encouragement which had been given to them by Clemenceau.

Before the Supreme Council met in London on March 14th the fate of the General Reserve had already been settled. I ascertained enough about the position to understand that before our first sitting. General Bliss, who was an unswerving advocate of the policy of the army of manœuvre under Foch, was just as convinced as I was that it was impossible to revive it without provoking a controversy in which Britain, France and America would be at cross-purposes. The battle was a few days off. This was no time for another crisis. It had cost nearly three weeks to dispose of the Robertson controversy. This dispute would have involved a much more serious conflict, for Clemenceau, Haig and Pétain would all have been ranged against the British War Cabinet. We had to make the best of an unsatisfactory situation. Haig assured me before the meeting, as Pétain had already assured Clemenceau, that the most detailed arrangements had been perfected for the co-operation of the two armies in the coming battle. With that assurance I had to be satisfied. Bliss, Orlando and I expressed a hope that as the fight developed it might still be possible to organise a General Reserve on the lines of the Versailles scheme, Foch, however, knowing the magnitude of the risk that was being run, entered an angry protest. He complained that the experts of the Supreme Council had been completely ignored, and that they had not even been informed of the character of the arrangements which, it was alleged, had been made by the two Commanders-in-Chief, to throw their reserves into the battle and to come to each other's aid. Clemenceau lost his temper and rudely told Foch to "Shut up." Foch's only reply was, "I cannot hold myself responsible for what will happen." Clemenceau retorted by taunting the Versailles Board with their failure to carry out the Resolution of the Supreme Council which had been proposed by me and accepted by Orlando, to arrange for bringing eleven Italian divisions to France. Foch's answer was complete. He said that that was an essential part of the formation of a General Reserve. These divisions were to be Italy's contribution. When the General Reserve was shelved by France and Britain they could not ask Italy to be the sole contributors. The demand made by Versailles on the Italian Army had therefore to be dropped.

The attack on our lines by Germany's gigantic army had thus to be faced without putting the defences of the attacked front in order, because our labour was diverted to working on a salient admitted to be indefensible, and because numbers of divisions were put into the line and invaluable reserves were massed in support of favoured sectors which were not threatened with any immediate danger. We were also without any General Reserve to support the sector attacked by the enemy and deprived of the Italian reinforcements which would have been invaluable in filling up gaps on our weak Fifth Army Front. Haig, as we have seen, had a poor opinion of the Italian infantry. He had preferred two British to four Italian Divisions. But even assuming that he was right in his estimate of their quality—and here I venture respectfully to disagree with his estimate—they could have held the unassailed parts of our own or the French Front and thus released more seasoned troops for the battle line. It was soon to become evident that we had no sufficient working arrangement for co-operation between the British and French Armies. Had these matters been attended to, the German attacks could have been repelled with such devastating losses than any hope of their renewal would have been abandoned and a satisfactory peace might have been reached without having to wade through the terrible slaughter of another summer and autumn campaign. But the G.H.Q.'s decreed otherwise and at this stage there was neither the time nor the allied unity which was essential for any attempt on so formidable a resistance. Wrangles and recriminations between Foch and Clemenceau were futile to save the situation. I therefore refrained from prolonging this rasping quarrel between these two great Frenchmen. There was a suggestion that we should save our faces by setting up some simulacrum of a General Reserve. I dislike participating in shams. A reserve army without real divisions would have been nothing more. The soldiers had once more defeated the politicians and there were rejoicings amongst the Headquarter Generals, their Staffs and adherents. They had beaten off triumphantly all assaults on their positions. Both strategy and tactics in intrigue were masterly. Alas that these gifts were so much less effective when directed against the foe they were engaged to fight! The nation and the poor fighting soldiers of the Fifth and Third Armies had to pay dearly for these brass-hat triumphs. It is one of the ironies of political warfare that the men subsequently attacked in Parliament for the inevitable results of these errors of judgment were not the real delinquents, but the men who strove hard to save the Army from the effects of their delinquency. The perpetrators of the calamitous mistakes which left the Fifth Army to be overwhelmed through sketchy defences and inadequate reserves were not only excused but lauded, and according to precedent ultimately rewarded.



## CHAPTER LXXVIII

### THE MARCH RETREAT

As the battle approached, there is nothing that struck me more at the time, and even now when looking back upon it, than the kind of composure, amounting almost to supineness, which reigned amongst those who would have the most direct and terrible responsibility for the lives of myriads and the fate of nations when the struggle commenced. On the German side all leave had been stopped for some weeks before the battle. On ours it went on as usual. The strength of our divisions was substantially reduced by men home on leave. It is difficult to understand this confident demeanour in such circumstances. After the battles of the Somme and the Scarpe, and more particularly of Flanders, the military nerve ceased to respond to the memory of past horror or the prospect of future ghastliness. The deadening effect of prolonged war upon the susceptibilities seemed to blunt the sense of responsibility in matters great and small. I have already shown how tardily the military leaders moved in the improvement of the defences, in the arrangements of the troops, in the disposition of the reserves. When danger was imminent, when it was known where it would fall, there was little quickening of movement at G.H.Q., not much hurry or hustle to see that no precautions had been omitted, or preparation overlooked, or contingency unthought of. There were two episodes seemingly small in comparison with the immensity of the rapidly approaching portent, but significant of this attitude of irresponsibility.

It is the supreme duty of any man who is at the head of a concern to choose his subordinates without reference to personal likes or dislikes, but entirely on their qualifications for the post. Many of the mistakes committed in war, in business and in politics, are due to a friendly desire to give a lift to men who are not qualified for a position to which they are elevated. It seemed to me that Haig was governed in his choice of men far too much by his desire to have around him those who were personally agreeable to himself, and who would not clash with his dictatorial temper by suggesting any difference of opinion.

There were two appointments made during the period of preparation for the conflict by the Commander-in-Chief which illustrate this cardinal defect. The first was the advancement of a divisional



## THE MARCH RETREAT

Scale of Miles.

0 5 10 20

Front on 21<sup>ST</sup> March

" " 4<sup>TH</sup> April

Army Boundaries

<b>BRITISH</b>	<b>FRENCH</b>
<b>BRITISH</b>	<b>FRENCH</b>
<b>21<sup>ST</sup> MARCH.</b>	<b>4<sup>TH</sup> APRIL.</b>

Soissons

—Stanford, London

General, inconspicuous for achievement and not endowed with any exceptional ability, to the all-important post of Chief of the General Staff. The C.G.S. was the principal adviser of the Commander-in-Chief on all questions affecting strategy and tactics. With an army of over two million men holding a line of over 100 miles against the most formidable warriors in the world, it was essential that the Commander-in-Chief should have at his elbow the best strategist in the Army, in training, in experience and in intellect. There were men in the British Army who possessed these attributes in a high degree. Sir Douglas Haig overlooked them all, and appointed Sir Herbert Lawrence. He was a cavalry officer who held a very subordinate command in the Boer War but who had been in the same regiment as Haig. He there, no doubt, conducted himself with all the gallantry and dash one would expect from a British soldier in the task of chasing elusive Boers across the African veldt with indifferent horses and horsemen. As soon as the South African War was over he retired from the Army and threw himself into finance. After 15 years behind a city desk, he volunteered for the Great War. He acquired some experience of trench warfare in resisting sporadic Turkish attacks, supported by light artillery and inadequate ammunition, on the Gallipoli Peninsula. He came to France only in 1917. He was given a divisional command, and did his duty without distinction.

General Kiggell was retired from the post of C.G.S. in January, 1918, and suddenly Lawrence was promoted to the most important and responsible position in the Army, next to that of the Commander-in-Chief, and that at the most difficult and critical stage of the War. As far as the British Army was concerned, he became the opposite number of Ludendorff, one of the two, or possibly three, most brilliant Staff officers on either side in the whole War. Nothing but genius of the highest order could merit or justify such dazzling promotion with such scant experience. Not the warmest, or the most charitable amongst Lawrence's friends—and as he possesses an amiable disposition and an attractive personality he must have attached to himself a great many friends—would claim that he possessed military genius of that or any other order. It is not the only action or omission of Haig's in this crisis which forces one to ask: Why did he do it?

Here is another episode. The Fifth Army was given the task of defending the part of the line where it became clear to all those who studied the symptoms that the attack was most likely to come. The defences were insufficient and the numbers of the defenders quite inadequate to such a task. Haig ought to have appointed his very best officers to command troops that were likely to be attacked under such conditions. A few weeks before the battle he removed a General who was in command of one of the army corps in that



area. By every canon of prudent leadership he ought to have chosen the best man available as his successor. But he had at Headquarters a favourite officer, General Butler, who up to that time had not had an opportunity of commanding troops in the field at all. Haig thought this was Butler's opportunity. Surely this was the last choice he ought to have made. It was unfair to Butler himself. It was not fair to Gough. It was most unfair of all to the troops who were thus doomed to fight against enormous odds under a callow leader. Butler was a pleasant fellow with a forbidding frown, cultivated on the Robertson model of countenance. It was supposed to give an impression of calm and ruthless strength. It was not such a success as Robertson's and there was nothing like as much behind it. Butler was not devoid of intelligence but he had not that kind of brain that triumphs over inexperience in difficult situations.

I am not certain that the best commander of an army corps placed in Butler's unfortunate position would have altogether succeeded. But one never knows what a really tried and skilful leader will do in the worst conditions. As to Lawrence's appointment I have always had a feeling that an able soldier of exceptional intelligence equipped with a thorough knowledge of the problems of warfare on the Western Front, and possessing the adequate independence of character to give the best advice to his Chief without reference to his palate, would have averted some of the most serious blunders which landed us in the defeats of March and April.

And now after all these misunderstandings, mistakes and negligences came the most stupendous battle ever fought on this earth. Three of the mightiest nations of the world were putting the last throb of their strength into a struggle which lasted without cease for months and into which they cast the millions which remained of their young manhood. Highly competent observers and students of this vast and deadly combat have written of its many fluctuations. I shall put down what I can recall with the aid of contemporary documents of how it appeared to one who witnessed its course from his seat at the head of the Government which had the supreme direction of the affairs of this country during these strenuous and anxious months.

On March 13th, the Director of Military Operations, Sir Frederick Maurice, reported to the Cabinet the appearance of the Brandenburg Corps in reserve south of Lille, but said that it made no difference in the total number of enemy divisions, which remained at 186. He informed us that this gave an approximate total of enemy rifle strength of 1,370,000 men and an artillery strength of 15,700 guns, while the total Allied rifle strength on the Western Front numbered 1,500,000 infantry and 16,600 guns. The average strength of the British divisions was larger than that of the German divisions.\* This report of March 13th was given to us the day before the meeting of the

\* The number of battalions in the Dominion troops had not been cut down.

Supreme War Council in London to which I have already referred. The only further report as to numbers came on March 19th, when it was said that another 400 enemy guns had been located and two more German divisions. Even with this addition there was a definite superiority on the Allied side in both guns and men. But although slightly inferior in numbers, the Germans had managed to mass enormous forces behind the line of attack. That is why Foch was so anxious to build up a General Reserve of French and British divisions behind the threatened sectors.

When the War Cabinet met for its usual morning sitting on the 21st of March, it was informed by the C.I.G.S. that the Germans had commenced a heavy bombardment before dawn on a front of 80 kilometres, from the Scarpe to the Oise, and that this front of attack was in general accord with the one anticipated by the British Staff at Versailles. The news that arrived in the course of the day was very confused and gave us no clear idea of what had happened in the fighting. But there was nothing in the reports recorded to excite alarm. When we met the following morning, i.e., the 22nd of March, the information conveyed to us by the C.I.G.S. on reports from G.H.Q. was not much more definite. There was the usual *communiqué* to which we had been accustomed, about "very heavy enemy casualties" but no particulars as to our own, and Sir Henry Wilson ended his statement by informing us that "the information received up to now gave no cause for anxiety." The Cabinet was anxious to have all the latest intelligence as to the comparative strength of the forces engaged on both sides together with the reserves. This he promised to have prepared. He was of the opinion that the attack would develop into a long-drawn-out battle, deliberately intended for a trial of strength, in order that a decisive result might be arrived at. Nothing reached the War Office during this second day of the battle to modify the reports which had been communicated to us in the morning.

By March 23rd the news from G.H.Q. was not as reassuring as that which we had received the previous two days. It was reported that on the Fifth Army Front the enemy had succeeded in penetrating our battle zone and reserve lines, and that a retirement had in consequence been made to the line of the Somme. A more serious indication of the state of affairs came with the report that our casualties were 40,000 and that not less than 600 guns had been lost. Even then there were reassuring items in the report. On the Third Army Front we were told that the enemy had in the main been held firmly in the battle zone except at Mory, and enormous slaughter had undoubtedly been inflicted on the enemy in places.

I had a feeling that the position was much graver than the G.H.Q. messages would imply. It looked as if Gough's tired army was giving way before the fierce onrush of the German hordes. It was evident that our line was broken and that we were relying upon patchwork

defences hastily improvised to stop a victorious army. The news that all the reserves of the Fifth Army had been already thrown in was disconcerting. A report of Haig's visiting Pétain to persuade him to take over a part of the battle front was certainly disquieting. It showed that the vaunted arrangement between Haig and Pétain to help each other in the day of trouble had failed to function, and that even on the third day of the battle it was bringing no real reinforcement to troops which were fighting desperately against odds of three to one.

I always worked early in the morning and I received the battle news at the earliest available hour. I gathered on that Saturday morning that the War Office seemed to be either bewildered or stunned by the reports. I therefore decided to postpone the Cabinet and to take matters in hand at the War Office itself. I invited the Staff to meet me there in order to see what could be done to throw all available reinforcements into France with the greatest attainable celerity. The first thing to ascertain was what troops we had in this country, the next what we could spare and then how many per day we could send across the Channel. I instructed the Adjutant-General to have the figures ready as to troops in this country. To help us as to transport I asked the Shipping Controller to meet me before I went to the War Office, and explained to him the emergency and the importance of getting across as many men as he could carry in the shortest space of time. He promised to go into the question and find how many ships he could lay his hands on for that purpose.

At the conference I summoned at the War Office, Major-General Sir Robert Hutchison (now Lord Hutchison), the Director of Organisation, was prepared with figures as to trained men in the country who were immediately available for drafts. I found him prompt, efficient and reliable. We were informed by him that there were 170,000 who were ready to be moved at once to France as fast as there was transport capacity. This included 50,000 trained youths between 18½ and 19 years of age. A pledge had been given in Parliament that youths under 19 years old should not be sent overseas unless there was a national emergency. We decided that such an emergency had now arisen. The Germans had already incorporated a considerable number of their 18-year-olds in their divisions at the front. On further investigation the figure of the numbers of men available for drafting to France rose to over 212,000 by the 20th of April. We were astonished to ascertain that there were 88,000 men on the establishment in France who were on leave in this country. The Germans had already stopped all leave some weeks before the attack. When an attack was expected any day on our front it struck me that the absence of so many men from their battalions required some explanation. When an offensive was anticipated on our side leave was always postponed. Eighty-eight thousand men absent from their battalions would mean that each of the divisions in France would be short of its full



strength, that is, by several hundreds per division. On that basis, the Fifth Army would have over 10,000 of their men on leave on the day of the battle. No wonder Gough complained that some of the battalions were not up to strength! In addition to the above there were 30,000 men in depots in France and the Dominions had another 10,000 in this country and in France.

The next step was to take measures to transport the drafts to France. In practice it had been found possible to carry across 8,000 a day. After another conference with Sir Joseph Maclay I found he could scrape together the necessary shipping to take over to France 20,000, working up to 30,000 a day.

With the divisions it had already been arranged before the battle commenced to bring over from Italy, and divisions promised by the Italians, the present and prospective losses in the battle were thus more than made up. To give further confidence to our Army we decided to bring over at once from Egypt the men from the three divisions which it had already been arranged should be filled up by Indian troops.

Total Allied forces in the Turkish theatres (Palestine and Mesopotamia) were as six to five of the enemy forces, according to the War Office estimates given to the Man-power Committee. As a matter of fact our superiority was nearer two to one. Indian divisions could, at any time after the conquest of Baghdad and the overthrow of the Turkish Army in that country, have been brought to Palestine and thus released several divisions for France. But here again to do so would have meant telling the full tale of Turkish disintegration to these mischievous politicians at home. There was the real enemy upon which great soldiers had to concentrate their subtlest arts and wiles. In this emergency we decided to do at once what ought to have been done by the Staff months ago—bring British divisions from Egypt to France and replace them by Indian divisions that were not wanted in Mesopotamia. This reconstruction had in fact already been ordered weeks before the Battle of Amiens.

In going through all this process at the War Office I realised how the struggles between Versailles and the Chief of Staff had diverted the minds of those who were directing the organisation and distribution of our forces from their primary and urgent duties. There is nothing half as absorbing of time, thought and energy as a quarrel between professional factions engaged in bitter rivalry. The Italian, Mesopotamian and Palestine arrangements ought to have been put through in time to reinforce our Army in France long before the German offensive was due.

I called a Cabinet Meeting in the afternoon of Saturday, March 23rd, at the War Office to consider the situation and to sanction the measures taken at the morning conference in view of the less favourable reports from the front. The Cabinet were given such information

as to the course of the battle as had been received during the day from G.H.Q. There was some discussion about the French tardiness in helping us. It was stated that Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig had gone that day to meet General Pétain with a view to arranging that the French should take over more line. Wilson thought it better not to tell us that the telegram from Haig said that "the situation was serious." It was the first communication from G.H.Q. that displayed any real appreciation of the gravity of the position. Haig also informed Wilson that the arrangements for the French to come and take over the line of the Somme would not be completed till the 29th (the ninth day of the battle). Nor did Wilson repeat accurately what Haig had said about seeing Pétain. "I am going to meet Pétain to-night," was the actual phrase.

A question was raised as to whether it was necessary to put any political pressure on the French Government to render us the necessary assistance, and a suggestion was made that either Milner or myself should go immediately to Paris for that purpose. However, it was thought by the C.I.G.S. and his Staff undesirable for Ministers to interfere between the Generals unless and until it was found that Haig and Pétain could not adjust matters between themselves, so it was decided to wait until the result of Haig's conference with Pétain was known. In the course of the discussion which took place, I pointed out that if the Versailles scheme for the constitution and control of the Allied General Reserve had only been brought into full operation, it would not have been necessary to have this bargaining with the French in the middle of a battle, but that the Executive War Board would have decided immediately where the large reserves at their disposal could have been thrown in to the best advantage for checking the enemy advance. It so happens that we know exactly what would have taken place if the plan of the General Reserve had been persisted in. Great Commanders usually keep their plans to themselves, but on this occasion the great Commander was President of a Board, and was thus compelled to disclose his ideas. Two of the Controlling Board only understood English, and Foch's French had to be translated: the interpreter, who was also the Secretary, was thus compelled to learn Foch's plans. He has put them on record.

Foch in effect said to the Executive War Board "Ludendorff must launch his mass of attack either eastward or southward, either towards the British side of the angle in the Cambrai region, or towards the French side of the angle and the Rheims region. But if he is successful, and drives one or other of these lines back, he himself presents an unguarded and open flank: and the more successful he is and the more he enlarges the angle, the longer and therefore the more open and unguarded his flank will be.

"I will, therefore, divide my General Reserve into three portions, of different sizes. The smallest portion I will place in Dauphiné, close

to the best crossing into Italy; the largest I will concentrate round Paris; the third portion I will place round Amiens."

This is the disposition Foch intended to make of the General Reserve in February. As it became increasingly evident that the attack was to be made on the British Front, Foch would have moved more of his reserves into the Amiens area. It will be observed that Gough would thus have had 20 to 25 divisions ready to help him.

At the meeting of the War Cabinet held on Saturday afternoon—the third day of the battle—the Director of Military Intelligence, General Macdonogh, and the Director of Military Operations, Sir Frederick Maurice, supplied the latest figures of comparison between the enemy and Allied forces. They now increased the numbers of the German rifle strength to 1,402,800 and reduced the Allied numbers to 1,418,000; still a slight superiority, it will be observed, for the Allies. The comment of the C.I.G.S. upon this estimate was that he considered that for purposes of calculation, the present forces might be reckoned as approximately equal. This observation did not make any allowance for the mechanical superiority of the Allies.

Those who were on leave in England were counted in the estimate given two or three days before, as if they were in France. I believe the numbers actually in France at the date of the commencement of the battle were alone included in the second reckoning. If so, that may partially explain the disparity between the two estimates.

After disposing of the more pressing questions of sending immediate reinforcements to France, we turned our attention to searching out the ways and means of replenishing our reserves of men available for the front in the event of the War going on into the winter of 1918, and the spring of 1919. Here we were not so successful. There were only two sources available—the combing out of essential men in vital industries and the conscription of Ireland. The latter I agreed to much against my better judgment, by a pressure which came from many quarters at home and in France. But that part of the story I must postpone. On the whole we did an excellent afternoon's work and the machinery we set in motion for dealing with the immediate crisis worked without a hitch.

The same evening—the 23rd—the reports from France not improving, I decided that either Milner or myself must go over at once to see why and where the arrangements for mutual help had failed to operate and whether things could not be set right before possible disaster supervened. I sent for Milner and discussed the whole situation with him. We both felt that there was only one effective thing to do and that was to put Foch in control of both armies. We both agreed that if there had been in existence a General Reserve of 30 divisions under the independent control of a Commander with Foch's gift of lightning decision, enough reinforcements would already have been thrown in to restore the line. As soon as the news reached the



Executive Board that the German concentration was taking place between Arras and the Oise, most of the reserves would have been moved into that area and a sufficient number would have been moved so close up to the line that they could have gone into action by the evening of the first day, certainly by the morning of the second. Instead of which we had all this manœuvring between Haig and Pétain as to which of them ought to rush in first with his reserves, and as to whether Pétain ought not to take over entirely part of the British line and if so when. We were informed that there was a question as to whether Haig's forces should not fall towards the north and Pétain's towards Paris, leaving a fatal gap between the British and French Armies. Had the General Reserve of 30 divisions been in existence there could have been no gap unless this formidable reserve were beaten. Pétain maintained that until the battle had fully developed he could not be certain that the Germans would not attack his front in the Champagne district where they had gathered considerable reserves. If they did so, Pétain said he might find his own reserves entangled in another battle. He was all for "Wait and See" before committing too many of his reserves to the Somme battle. On the other hand, Haig had most of the British troops which were available for reinforcement placed at the other extreme of his line. It would take a long time to move them. So the argument went on. They did not argue together face to face as they ought to have done. They conferred with their respective Staffs, each in his own Headquarters where they were all agreed that it was for the other wing to flutter first. Meanwhile the valiant soldiers of the Fifth Army were perishing for want of help from one or other of these exalted interpreters of a compact lacking precision. It was a deplorable outcome for the "complete and detailed arrangements" that were to "move quickly."

The news that had reached the War Office by the evening of the 23rd showed that this description was not mere conjecture on Milner's part or mine. And the facts, as we subsequently discovered, were an understatement of the muddle. It was therefore decided that nothing would put an end to this calamitous manœuvring but the direct intervention of the meddling politicians.

Accordingly we agreed that Milner should at once leave for Paris to see Clemenceau. We thought it better that I should remain in London to direct the plans I had made for the rapid dispatch of reinforcements to France so that there should be no delay in that respect. I authorised Milner to do what he could to restore the broken Versailles Front by conferring upon Foch the necessary authority to organise a reserve and to control its disposition. How well Milner carried out this arrangement will appear when I tell the story of the Doullens Conference. It fell far short of the Versailles plan, but it was as far as he could obtain agreement and it was on the road to the establishment of final unity amongst the armies. Before I give an

account of the Doullens decision I must first of all give a further account of what we ascertained was actually happening in the matter of reinforcing the broken front of the Third and Fifth Armies.

When the attack began on March 21st, G.H.Q. had two divisions—the 20th and the 39th—in reserve behind the Fifth Army. I have already reckoned these amongst the divisions holding that part of the front. As these two divisions were in Gough's opinion too far behind his army, he was anxious to move them closer up to the front. He moved the 39th Division a little closer to the front. The 20th Division was 15 miles behind the front of the XVIII Corps, and he wanted to move it up five to eight miles further north of it. In addition he wished to move forward the 50th Division, which was a division just brought down from the Fourth Army and placed in Army Reserve. It was more than 25 miles behind his front, and he wished to bring it at least one day's march nearer. In his opinion, these steps were "most urgent, almost vital," and he asked the authority of G.H.Q. for these moves. He was refused permission to move a man. As he himself points out in his book, "no one had suffered more from the failure to recognise this principle than had Haig himself at the Battle of Loos, when Sir John French had denied him the use of his reserves until too late." In fact, French's dismissal and Haig's appointment as his successor were largely attributable to this action on French's part. There can be no doubt that G.H.Q.'s refusal to allow these two divisions to be shifted nearer to the front had injurious effects. Although when the battle started, Gough finally took the responsibility for ordering them up without permission from G.H.Q., the 20th Division did not come into action until the 22nd and the 50th Division not until the afternoon of the same day.

If these divisions had been thrown in during the first day of the battle, they might have helped to stay the German advance; but they were quite inadequate to restore a line which had been broken by a force where the assailants were in the proportion of three or four to one of the defenders and the best entrenchments had already fallen into enemy hands. There ought to have been many more divisions ready to be thrown in, at the latest on the second day of the battle. The first division sent by G.H.Q. to the broken front was the 8th. It reached Eterpigny, a few miles behind the line to which the army had retreated, by the 23rd—the third day of the battle, but only some of its units came into action on that day. On the morning of the 24th, the fourth day of the battle, its front line was six miles behind that held by the British Army on the previous morning, and fourteen miles behind the original front. The second division ordered to move in support of the Fifth Army was the 35th. Some incomplete battalions without artillery came into action on the fourth day, but it was only on the 25th—that is, the fifth day of the battle, that the division was complete. Its remaining battalions arrived that day, and its artillery

came up in the course of the afternoon. As rail accommodation from the north was fully occupied in the movement of the 8th Division and of divisions which had been ordered to support the Third Army, the 5th had to march by road. Had these divisions been shifted nearer the threatened sectors as soon as it was discovered where the blow was to come, these tragic delays would not have occurred and these reinforcements might have exerted a decisive influence on the course of the battle. No other reinforcements were sent by G.H.Q. to that battle front during the week of incessant fighting.

On the night of the 24th the whole of the VII Corps, including the 5th Division, was transferred to the Third Army, and thus passed out of Gough's control. On the 28th the remainder of his army was placed under General Rawlinson's command. Gough's statement, therefore, that during the whole of the time he was in command in that battle he was only given one additional division (the 8th) from the reserves of G.H.Q. on other fronts is quite accurate.

This extraordinary tardiness in sending reinforcements may be explained by the slowness with which G.H.Q. came to comprehend the seriousness of the position. I have quoted the first telegram from Haig to C.I.G.S. which used the phrase "the situation is serious." That was received on the third day of the fight. Gough reports that he had a conversation with Haig's Chief of the Staff, Lawrence, late at night on the first day of the battle. To quote his words:—

"Lawrence did not seem to grasp the seriousness of the situation; he thought that 'the Germans would not come on again next day'; 'after the severe losses they had suffered,' he thought that they 'would be busy cleaning the battlefield,' 'collecting the wounded, reorganising, and resting their tired troops.'

I disagreed emphatically, but I failed to make much impression. It has always been my opinion that G.H.Q. did not fully grasp the magnitude of the assault on the Fifth Army, or the desperate odds which it had to contend with, and this may have accounted for the misconceptions that we allowed to circulate so freely, even in the Cabinet, during the following weeks."\*

The telegrams from G.H.Q. passed on to the Cabinet by the C.I.G.S. show that if there were any misconceptions as to the condition of things in Cabinet circles, it was due to this lack of understanding on the part of G.H.Q. in France as to what had really taken place. As I pointed out, the first telegram from Haig which showed that he had at last woken up to the gravity of the situation, came to the War Office on the morning of the third day of the battle.

What was happening in French Headquarters? The impression made on the mind of Pétain and his Staff by the first news was that

\* Gough: "The Fifth Army," p. 271.



this was not the real offensive—it was only a local attack in order to induce the French to take their reserves away from the Champagne Front where the real attack was to be made. During the whole of the first and second days of the battle, Pétain had no communication of any sort from Haig. During the first day nothing came to the French G.H.Q. at Compiègne except rumours and scraps of incoherent reports, not one of which came from the British G.H.Q. In the afternoon of the first day General Humbert, who had been appointed by Pétain to command the reserves which were to be sent to help the British in certain contingencies, visited Gough's Headquarters. Gough asked him whether he had brought reinforcements. Humbert answered that he had nothing except the little banneret fluttering on the bonnet of his car. Not a single battalion had been placed under his command. That was the "perfect arrangement worked out in every detail," which was to be the substitute for a General Reserve in the day of trial. It is only fair to Pétain to say that without waiting to be asked, he put arrangements in hand on the evening of the 21st for sending divisions of the French V Corps to assist the British. Haig sent a message thanking him for his prompt support, but saying he did not want the French to intervene yet.

On the second day, the 125th French Division began to arrive behind the British lines; but it was not complete and it was therefore not put into the line until the morning of the 23rd—that is, the third day of the battle. This was the first reinforcement of any kind Gough received.

On the evening of the second day, Pétain heard, probably from his own Intelligence Staff, that "the enemy had broken through a large portion of the British lines, and had driven back Gough's Army, which, beaten down by great masses of troops and overwhelmed by their numbers, was retreating precipitately. Behind the British right there was no reserve at all." But an event occurred that night which turned the attention of the French Headquarters to much more menacing things. German aeroplanes dropped a number of bombs on the Headquarters at Compiègne, killing two officers. This had never happened before in the whole course of the War. Headquarters on both sides were sacred and immune from the perils which befell the mere fighting soldier. But evidently there were depths of barbarism which the "Hun" had not yet plumbed. Headquarters were as excited as an ants' nest into which a stone had been dropped. Officers and archivists were moved that night into the forest where they would be hidden from the German destroyer. Late at night, when Headquarters were made safe from bombers, they turned their attention once more to carrying out the arrangements made with Haig. A second division, and a cavalry division, were ordered to go to the British Front, and came into action in the afternoon of the third day of the battle, without their artillery or transport, and with only the

ammunition they carried on their persons. The "arrangements" were beginning to work, but oh! how slowly and how timorously!

On the fourth day of the battle two more French divisions, but without their artillery or transport and with not much more ammunition than they carried in their bandoliers, arrived. This to help an army which had lost most of its guns!

On that day the French took over the southern end of the British line. After four days of desperate fighting, when the odds were so heavily against us, the entire reinforcements consisted of six divisions—three without their artillery. It transposed the odds from about three or four to one to a certain three to one; the three consisting of troops inspired by victory, the one made up mostly of the broken remnants of a defeated army and of divisions hurried along and arriving in the night panting and without their equipment of guns and ammunition.

That night Pétain and Haig met for the first time during the battle to discuss and decide arrangements. Gough saw Haig, for the first time since the battle began, on Sunday, the 24th, when he met him at Corps H.Q. and talked to him for about ten minutes. No General Officer from G.H.Q. had visited the Fifth Army to see what was going on, nor did any member of G.H.Q. (other than Lawrence) visit Gough from one end of the battle to the other. Haig's consolation to Gough for his defeat was "Well, Hubert, you cannot fight a battle without men." He never told him that but for the Passchendaele obsession his defences would have been better prepared and his line more strongly held, and that had it not been for Haig's refusal to work the Versailles scheme for a General Reserve, ample reinforcements would have reached him in time to counter-attack the enemy and fling them back. Three weeks before the battle he knew where it was coming. Had he then taken steps to rearrange his forces so as to hold the threatened sectors of the Third and Fifth as strongly as the two Northern (and unmenaced) sectors were then being held, there would have been  $37\frac{1}{2}$  divisions to face the enemy, instead of 30. What an enormous difference that would have made to the result, even without a General Reserve! And the fronts of the First and Second Armies could still have been held more strongly than that of the Fifth Army on the first day of the battle.

What was happening to the Third Army? This was much better cared for than the slighted and cast out Fifth. Byng was given 16 divisions to hold 28 miles of line, to Gough's 14 to hold 42 miles. It had another advantage in that it was next-door neighbour to the privileged sectors where Haig had massed most of his troops. How great a pull that was the first few days of the battle demonstrated. The reserves were at least one day nearer. Between the 21st and 23rd March, G.H.Q. issued orders for the bringing of eight divisions from the Northern Fronts to reinforce the Third Army—each division fully

equipped and containing 50 per cent. more troops than the French divisions that came to Gough's aid. As these divisions came from contiguous sectors they also came into action several hours before the Fifth Army reinforcements.

The Third Army might have held the ground without retreating at all had it not been for the complication of the Flesquières salient. The account of the battle given in the Official History shows how important and damaging a part that salient played in the fight. It completely disarranged and dislocated our defence. Three whole divisions had been set apart to defend it, although it had been admitted by G.H.Q. to be indefensible whenever seriously attacked. The Germans worked their way round it and Byng found it difficult to extricate his troops from toils he himself had woven and into which he had firmly tucked three unfortunate divisions. Instead of getting out whilst the going was fairly good he tried to hold half the salient. He was reluctant to give up the only bit of ground he had won in the bungled tank attack of Cambrai. The result was that right and left the whole defence of his line and part of Gough's were thrown out of gear. A great gap was opened between the Third and Fifth Armies. Tudor, with the 9th Division which had on the 21st March conducted a gallant and successful fight on the left flank of the Fifth Army, was compelled by the Flesquières folly to retreat from a position his fine division had so skilfully and valiantly defended.

The Fifth Army seemed to be doomed to bear the shortcomings and stupidities of all concerned both in the preparations for this battle and in its actual conduct. The Germans to the right of Flesquières and on the extreme right of Byng's Army were being held and their attacks repelled with appalling slaughter, but this serious tactical blunder gave them an opening. The Third Army was forced into a general and almost a headlong retreat and it was only the arrival of substantial reinforcements that enabled it to reform its front. Still on the front of the Third Army, taken as a whole, in spite of a considerable loss of ground by us, the Germans sustained much more damage than they inflicted. Their losses crippled them seriously at the time and still more in their future operations, and if the Third and Fifth Armies had even now been reinforced in time, the German advance could have been arrested and such a counter-blow delivered before they had consolidated their conquests as would have driven them back with severe losses. This check would have converted an enemy victory into a decisive defeat which would have put an end to any further hope of a German offensive. That is, the Allied victory of the 18th July might have been anticipated.

What was the position on the whole battle front after four days of intense fighting? The Fifth Army was no longer an Army. It was broken up into fragments—still fighting as it drifted back. It is right to note that there was no running away. To quote one report: "there



was no skedaddle." But the zig-zag where it rested on the night of the 24th was on an average over 16 miles behind the line which it held at dawn on the 21st and further retreats were inevitable. It was anticipated by British and French Headquarters that Amiens would be lost. The Third Army was also in full retreat. It had been driven miles behind the original line. Pétain on the fourth day was arranging to take over the southern portion of the Fifth Army area, but even on the sixth day of the battle he told Poincaré that he was afraid his divisions would not arrive in time to relieve the British Army. That was the prospect when Milner arrived in France on the afternoon of the 24th. From a member of our Staff at Versailles he learnt the actual situation. How little we had been told of the facts is made clear by one of the first sentences in the Memorandum he wrote on his visit for the benefit of the War Cabinet.

"The great mystery was the breakdown of the Fifth Army, which so far was not explained."

He was told that it was so much broken and its communications cut in all directions, that it was difficult to make out exactly what had happened. Apparently there was no one at G.H.Q. who was able to enlighten him. But he heard enough there, and on the road to Versailles, to come to the conclusion that "there was no doubt that this army was shattered and a breach effected in the Allied line between the right flank of the Third Army and the French." That meant that the Germans were within sight of attaining one of their great objectives—the separation of the French and the British Armies. The retreating troops were "still fighting at a number of points, and sometimes even counter-attacking, but were no longer anything like an organised barrier to the German advance."

The following day, Monday, March 25th, he attended a Conference held at Pétain's Headquarters, Clemenceau, Loucheur, Pétain and Foch being also present. Pétain took a very pessimistic view of the condition of the Fifth Army, which he said, as an army, had ceased to exist and would have to be completely reorganised. It had now been placed by Haig under his (Pétain's) orders. He was bringing up from the south and west—mostly from the south—"all the divisions he could possibly spare to support and replace the debris of the Fifth Army." But Pétain was still deluded by "the danger of the Germans pushing down the Oise from above Noyon, and a threatened attack in the region of Rheims."

Foch, who seems to have spoken with energy and determination, took a different view of the situation. He thought the danger of the German push to break in between the French and British in the direction of Amiens was so formidable that risks must be taken in other directions. In his opinion, even more divisions must, if possible, be thrown in, and, by a great effort, this might be done more quickly

than Pétain thought possible. It is in an emergency that the real quality of a man comes out. In front of this grave crisis both Pétain and Haig were bewildered and incapable of the action which a desperate situation demanded, but Foch rose to the occasion with the might of a giant. That accounts for the complete change which Milner found in the attitude of both Commanders-in-Chief towards this great old General. They were now anxious to retrace the fatal steps they had conjointly taken on the Versailles decision and to secure the help of Foch to extricate them from the dilemma in which their repudiation of his supremacy had landed the Allied Armies. At the end of the Conference, Poincaré and Clemenceau urged that something should be done in order to re-establish the complete co-operation of the two Armies. Although Milner had always been anxious for action on those lines, he could not take upon himself the responsibility of deciding until he had had an opportunity of consulting Haig. He might have pointed out that no one was more responsible than Clemenceau himself for the fact that the scheme agreed to by the Supreme Council seven weeks ago for securing such co-operation had been completely frustrated. After the Conference was over, Milner told Clemenceau that he had some misgivings "whether Pétain on his side was prepared to take sufficient risks in order to bring up all possible French reserves, on which, as it seemed to him, everything depended."

Clemenceau replied "that he agreed, but that Pétain was already doing *much more than he had originally contemplated*, and would, he believed, do more still." What an admission of the complete inadequacy of the arrangements made between Pétain and Haig as a substitution for the 30 Division Reserves under independent command!

The following day, March 26th, a Conference was held at Doullens at which Poincaré, Clemenceau, Pétain and Foch represented the French, and Milner, Haig and Wilson the British. When Milner arrived there, Clemenceau at once "seized him and startled him by the announcement that Haig had just declared that he would be obliged to uncover Amiens and fall back on the Channel ports." Milner immediately saw Haig, Plumer, Horne and Byng, and Haig assured him that he had been misunderstood. Haig did not inform them that he had only the day before handed to Weygand (Foch's Chief of Staff) the following document: —

"SECRET

The intention of the enemy is evidently to push strong forces between the English and French Armies and having effected this purpose to detain the French Army while throwing his whole available strength on the English and force the latter back upon the sea.

On the English Front from the sea to Ercheu the enemy have 65 divisions in line with 33 divisions in reserve of which latter 20 are fresh divisions. On the French Front from Ercheu to the Swiss frontier are 71 divisions in line with 24 divisions in reserve of which 21 are fresh divisions. But 15 divisions of the 71 in line are not fighting divisions.

The battle, which has lasted since 21st on the English Front has probably exhausted a certain number of German divisions and they are now drawing on the divisions holding the line or in reserve elsewhere.

But it is highly improbable that more than 21 reserve divisions are available for offensive on the French Front.

*The progress made by the enemy on our right and along the valley of the Somme makes it evident that it can only be a question of time when the French and English Armies are driven apart. It becomes necessary to take immediate steps to restore the situation and this is only possible by concentrating immediately astride the Somme west of AMIENS at least 20 French divisions to operate on the flank of the German movement against the English Army, which must fight its way slowly back covering the Channel ports.*

Any delay in deciding upon this plan would make the situation critical.

The two French divisions in Belgium should be concentrated immediately at DOULLENS.

25th March, 1918.

\* Copy of above handed to General Weygand at Abbeville at 4 p.m.

\* D. HAIG, F.M.

25th March, 1918."

(The asterisk signifies that this was written in Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig's own hand-writing.)

Haig clearly took a desperate view of the position. It is difficult to comprehend in the face of this document why he should have told Milner that he had been misunderstood. Pétain expressed an identical opinion about the same time to Clemenceau, and according to Poincaré was actually ordering a retreat of the French Army to the south. Clemenceau had agreed with Pétain. It would look, therefore, as if the two Commanders at this Conference on the evening of the 24th had come to the same conclusion. The supreme courage of Haig saved the situation. This was the greatest moment in his career. Here Poincaré's Diary on the subject is worth quoting, as, taken in conjunction with Haig's Memorandum, it shows the depth of dejection in which these eminent Commanders were floundering at this late date.



"He (Clemenceau) broke off to confide in me sadly that General Pétain was contemplating the retreat of the French Army to the south while the British Army retired towards the north. Pétain, added Clemenceau, had given orders on this basis. Foch confirmed this last piece of information and told me of the order to retreat which Pétain had given. 'The President of the Council (Clemenceau),' added Foch, 'has only just lately begun to take part in military matters; he had accepted Pétain's point of view, but I declined to take any responsibility for it. I sent M. Clemenceau a note to tell him my views. Common sense indicates that when the enemy wishes to begin making a hole, you do not make it wider. You close it, or you try to close it. We have only got to try and to have the will; the rest will be easy. You stick to your ground, you defend it foot by foot. We did that at Ypres, we did it at Verdun.' And Foch stuck to his point with the same energy before Clemenceau, the senator and the deputy.

Clemenceau, becoming more and more converted, took me aside and said 'Pétain is annoying because of his pessimism. Just think of it, he said to me what I would tell no one but yourself. It was this: "The Germans will beat the British in open country; after that, they will beat us too." Ought a General to talk, or even think, like that?'"

Before entering into the Conference at Doullens, Milner had a few words with Haig alone about Foch, and "was delighted to find that, so far from resenting, as he had been led to believe he might do, the thought of Foch's interference, he rather welcomed the idea of working with the latter, about whom his tone was now altogether friendly." After some interchange of views, the Conference agreed to the following form of words:—

"General Foch is charged by the British and French Governments to co-ordinate the action of the Allied Armies on the Western Front. He will work to this end with the Commanders-in-Chief, who are asked to furnish him with all necessary information."

Haig "seemed not only quite willing but really pleased."

What had been accomplished by this decision? I will quote two opinions expressed, one by the President of the Republic, who was at the Conference, and another by a very competent military observer, General Bliss. In a conversation which Poincaré had with Milner immediately after the meeting, he said:—

"This co-ordination was not worth as much as unity of command. To which Milner replied that there was no knowing what the future held in store, and in any case, co-ordination itself represented a step forward and would offer great advantages."

Both Poincaré's statement and Milner's reply constitute a very fair appreciation of what had been accomplished. It was a long way off unity of command. That was for the future. Meanwhile it was, as Milner truly said, an improvement on existing conditions.

General Bliss, writing about the Doullens Conference, confirms Poincaré's and Milner's views about what took place. This is what he has written about the Doullens Resolution:—

"Many persons think that this action made General Foch the Allied Commander-in-Chief. It did not. His functions were limited to the British and French Armies. They did not extend to the American Army. No American was summoned to the conference at Doullens. No control was given over the Belgian or Italian Armies. *Moreover, there was given him no power of command. He could only consult and advise. The result was what might have been expected. He had to waste precious time in travelling to one headquarters and the other, persuading Commanders to do what he should have been empowered to order.*"

A day or two after the Doullens Conference, General Gough was superseded. After days of hard fighting with insufficient forces against unfair odds his army had been shattered. The French, very unfairly, threw the blame of the defeat on him. Haig practically adopted the same line by removing Gough from his command. In his Despatches on this battle Haig, explaining Gough's supersession, writes:—

"Our troops had been engaged for a full week with an almost overwhelming superiority of hostile forces."

He proceeds to say that this had "thrown an exceptional strain on General Gough and his Staff" and that "in order to avoid the loss of efficiency which a continuance of such a strain might have entailed," he decided to appoint General Rawlinson to the command of the Fifth Army. Gough was sent to the rear to look after the digging. Whose fault was it that there had been an overwhelming superiority against the Fifth Army for a whole week? It was certainly not Gough's. Taking the Western Front as a whole, I have quoted official figures to show that the rival armies were approximately equal in numbers with a slight superiority in favour of the Allies, but with a definite mechanical advantage to the British and the French. Haig acknowledges that he knew in time where the offensive was coming. Gough was not responsible for the disposition of the Allied forces in such a way as to give to the Germans overwhelming superiority at the point of attack, and he could not be blamed for the fact that at the end of a full week of hard fighting the Germans still possessed that overwhelming superiority on the battle front. It was not Gough who

strangled the army of manœuvre which was designed for such an emergency as had arisen. Nevertheless, Gough's sacrifice has pointed the finger of censure at him. That was unfair—nay it was shabby. Whatever may be said of this gallant officer, he was certainly unfortunate in the tasks which had been entrusted to him by his Commander-in-Chief in this War. In Flanders he had been put in charge of an enterprise in which the finest army in the world and the most brilliant general could not have won success. On the Somme he had been given a position to defend which no general could have held with such few troops and guns in the line and in reserve. With a little help on the first day he would probably have beaten off the Germans. A few divisions would have done it.

Contrary to what is frequently stated, the dismissal of Gough from command of the Fifth Army was ordered by Haig entirely on his own initiative, without any instruction from home.\* The War Cabinet subsequently ordered Gough home, as this culminating dismissal of him by Haig, following the retreat of the Fifth Army, and the flood of rumours circulating in military circles against him made it *prima facie* appear that he was in some way culpable. Further inquiry did not support that case, and Lord Milner sent him a letter fully exonerating him and pronouncing him eligible for a fresh command.†

When Foch was given the rôle of co-ordinator the battle was going heavily in favour of the enemy. I recollect that on Good Friday morning the news filled us with anxiety and apprehension. The Germans were pressing British and French troops steadily back towards Amiens at a rate that made it seem inevitable that this important railway junction would fall into their hands. That would have been a catastrophe and we were not certain whether Foch's appointment had come in time to avert it. On the northern flank of the Third Army the Germans had launched another great attack which if it succeeded would have placed the whole of the Army in jeopardy. The only news received by Friday morning about the progress of this fresh development was not reassuring. We had been forced out of some of our positions and the battle was still raging. We were barely holding our own. Sir Maurice Hankey and I sat for hours in the Cabinet Room waiting anxiously for further reports from the front. We decided at last to go to St. Anne's, Soho, to hear Bach's Passion music. As we took our seats we heard the clergyman intone that poignant supplication, "Oh God make speed to save us." How fervently we joined in the response, "Oh Lord make haste to help us!" When we returned to Downing Street we heard that the Germans had been beaten off by the Third Army with heavy losses and that their advance was slowing down opposite Amiens.

\* See "Haig's Diary," edited by Duff Cooper, Vol. II, p. 267.

† "Official History, France and Belgium, 1918," Vol. I, p. viii.



## CHAPTER LXXIX

### BEAUVAIS AND THE CAMPAIGN OF THE NORTH

#### THE BEAUVAIS CONFERENCE

THE Doullens Resolution did not work as satisfactorily as we had hoped. General Foch might flit from one Headquarters to another, and suggest and propose and urge in his peremptory and vehement way one plan after another, but it was for Pétain and Haig to decide with their Staffs to work out the details and give their own orders their own way and their own time. These two Generals were quite happy to share the responsibility with Foch, but they were not ready to part with any of their authority. The greatest defect of the Doullens agreement was that it did not equip Foch with the necessary authority gradually to build up the Inter-Allied Reserve which was essential to any great scheme of counter-offensive. Haig and Pétain had gone a long way, but even in this moment of despair they were not ready to accept the Versailles decision as to an independent General Reserve commanded by Foch.

Reports came to the Cabinet that the Doullens arrangement was not working smoothly. Serious misunderstandings had arisen which were likely to affect prejudicially the conduct of the campaign. There was no one on the spot with any authority to settle these differences. Foch could not co-ordinate, because he was not in a position to command. That this was Foch's view is made clear by him in his memoirs: —

“ Now to plan this offensive action, to inspire and direct it, to ensure its being carried out by the Commanders-in-Chief, and also to arrive at an equitable distribution of forces, the powers conferred upon me by the Doullens Agreement were plainly inadequate. They were insufficient to cover even the present defensive operations; they would necessarily be all the more inadequate when, in the not far distant future, it became my duty to decide upon the strategic employment of the Allied Armies, renewed and strengthened by the co-operation of the Americans; to determine, according to circumstances, the point against which these forces should be applied; to distribute the offensive and defensive tasks, and possibly to effect exchanges between the French and Italian Front.

The simple rôle of *co-ordinator* was not sufficient for the larger programme which would certainly have to be undertaken shortly. It gave far too little play to the *initiative* of the officer who filled it, if he was to react rapidly and forcibly to contingencies brought about by a defensive battle, or to organise and launch important offensive operations. The rôle should be changed into one of *direction*. If the Inter-Allied organ created at Doullens by an effort of mutual confidence was to produce all that was expected of it, its powers must at once be widened, and the strategic direction of the War on the Western Front entrusted to it. Its authority over the Allied Commanders-in-Chief should be affirmed, and this authority extended to include all the troops in line from the North Sea to the Adriatic.

A few days' experience had been sufficient to expose the inadequacy of the Doullens Agreement. The present as well as the future interests of the Coalition required that it be amended without delay."\*

It was decided that another meeting with Clemenceau and the Generals should be arranged to straighten out this unsatisfactory position. I knew there was only one practical solution, and that was to appoint Foch to the Supreme Command of both armies, but at the meeting of the War Cabinet held to discuss the subject of my proposed visit I found that the majority were opposed to any such idea. Wilson, who was present, was thoroughly hostile to it. He said that Foch probably did not require any powers beyond those already accorded to him. This statement I subsequently found to be completely inaccurate. When I met Foch he was in despair at his impotence to direct the battle as he desired it to be fought. The Cabinet resolved that "the decisions must be left to my discretion after I had an opportunity of discussing the matter with Sir Douglas Haig." The meeting which finally led to the establishment of real unity of command was held at the Hôtel de Ville, Beauvais, on April 3rd, 1918. On my way to Beauvais, Wilson and I called at Haig's Headquarters. Haig and his Chief of Staff, Lawrence, then accompanied us to Beauvais. I drove part of the way with the Commander-in-Chief and the rest with his C.G.S. I thus was able to gather their views as to the progress of the battle. I found neither of them forthcoming on the subject of increasing Foch's powers. They saw no need for it. They were convinced that things were getting on quite well. When I reported to them the successful arrangements we had concluded for the shipping of American troops to France I expected not gratitude but some sense of relief over the good news. On the contrary they were both cool and snuffy about it. They gave me the impression that they did not think

\* Foch: "Memoirs" (Translation, pp. 313 and 314).

much of American help in 1918. It was only so much more trouble for G.H.Q. if they were incorporated in our divisions and when it was done it would be more a source of weakness than of strength! They thought of these masses that would soon be pouring into France as if they were an untrained rabble.

Not far from Beauvais I drove through the remnants of some of the broken battalions of the Fifth Army who were resting in villages behind the line. I have never observed a more cheerful crowd of men. There was no trace of dejection or despair. They accosted the delegation with smiling faces. It was not my picture of a defeated army.

When I came to the Hôtel de Ville I found Clemenceau, Foch, Pétain, Pershing and Bliss awaiting us. I had a preliminary conversation with Clemenceau and confided to him that I thought that the Doullens arrangement was too vague and that it was imperative that Foch should be endowed with greater and more direct authority over the Allied forces. Clemenceau, having already been approached by Foch on the subject and convinced by him, was of the same opinion. He began the conference by explaining that though the Doullens agreement had worked well up to a point, "the situation was, however, developing and a stage had been reached when it was necessary to define, with greater precision, the position of the 'General of the Coalition' as he would call General Foch." In fact, a decision was required as to whether the Doullens arrangement should stand as it was, or whether it required widening. He then called on General Foch to explain his views. Before he did so I asked that General Foch, in giving his views, would particularly specify in what respects he considered that the Doullens arrangement conferred insufficient authority on him to co-ordinate the action of the two armies. General Foch in reply:—

"reminded the Conference that the Doullens arrangement stated that he was charged with co-ordinating the action of the Allied Armies on the Western Front. This implied that if there were no action, there was nothing to co-ordinate. If the French were taking no action, and if the British Army were taking no action, it was impossible to co-ordinate their action. Consequently something more was now wanted. He required the power to imply an idea of action to the Commanders-in-Chief, and to have this action carried out. In fact, before co-ordinating he must have the power of creating action. For this reason the text of the Doullens arrangement was insufficient, and should be made to include 'power for the infusion of an idea of action.' Moreover, it was not so much necessary to co-ordinate the action itself as the preparation of action. In quiet times it was necessary to create an idea around which the preparations should be made in



co-ordination. On the 26th March at Doullens, the situation was very different from what it was on the 3rd April at Beauvais. On the former date it was a question of co-ordinating action which was in full swing. On the latter date it was a question of co-ordinating our preparation for future action. On the 26th March our armies were submitting to a battle imposed on us by the enemy, but to-day at Beauvais, we were thinking of our own action. In this latter case the powers of mere co-ordination of action were insufficient."

Sir Henry Wilson, who now that he had exchanged Versailles for Whitehall had rather modified his Versailles outlook, and had discussed the question with Haig in his car on the way to Beauvais, thought Doullens gave Foch all the powers he required and that there was no need for extension. Foch replied:—

"that, if there was no action, or no movement, there was nothing to co-ordinate. His requirements would be met by the insertion of some words such as 'order' (*'ordonner'*) or 'to give orders' (*'donner des ordres.'*)"

From Foch's statements I realised that the Cabinet had not been fully informed by the C.I.G.S. as to the main defect in the working of the Doullens agreement. Foch's complaint was not so much in respect of differences which had arisen on particular sections of the battle front and which needed adjustment, although it was not functioning altogether smoothly in that direction. It was a much more important issue. His thoughts projected beyond the arrest of the German attempt to break through at Amiens. Foch's mind was not so much on the German offensive which had now been checked as on the great counter-stroke which he had sketched in his famous January Memorandum on the plan of campaign for 1918. He was thinking of the next step—of the necessary preparations for fighting out to a final decision the vast battle which had commenced. In this essential task he found himself hampered by lack of real authority. As he was the only General in the field with the necessary vision and decision to plan out such a campaign I decided to take all risks to secure for him the requisite power. If I felt that I could not, there and then, commit the Cabinet the whole way in view of the misgivings they had revealed at their last meeting, I resolved to go as far as I could to-day and on my return carry the Cabinet with me the rest of the way.

I therefore followed Foch in this strain:—

"MR. LLOYD GEORGE said that, speaking on behalf of the British public, they were very anxious to ensure that divided counsels should not end in disaster. A real effort had been made to co-ordinate the action of the Allies by means of the Supreme War

Council and the Permanent Military Representatives at Versailles, because it had been realised that the Germans had one army and the Allies had three. Even last year the Allies on the Western Front had two strategies: Field-Marshal Haig's and General Pétain's.

FIELD-MARSHAL HAIG interpolated that last year, he was under the orders of General Nivelle."

Haig was flushed and by his voice and manner I saw he was very angry at the line I was taking.

"MR. LLOYD GEORGE said that he did not refer to that period, although he reminded the Conference that General Nivelle's strategy had achieved the most valuable results, so far as the British Army was concerned, of the whole year's fighting, since it had put the Allies in possession of the Vimy Ridge and the country east of Arras. What he had referred to, however, were the operations later in the year, when Field-Marshal Haig had been fighting in Flanders and General Pétain's Army had been carrying out operations with limited objectives at considerable intervals. The consequence was that, although the Allies had had a superiority against the Germans of something approaching three to two, they had, in fact, achieved very little. In their recent offensive, however, the Germans, though probably not superior in numbers, had achieved very considerable results, and this was mainly due to their unity of control. Versailles had been set up with the object of securing a similar unity of action, but it had not been in full operation when this offensive commenced and none of its decisions had been carried out. Whatever had resulted from the recent actions must be credited entirely to the measures of co-ordination which had been achieved, but it was not sufficient.

What he was apprehensive of was that the Allied Governments would to-day merely reach a new formula without achieving any real unity of command. The British public wanted, and intended to know whether there was real unity. What we had now to decide was that General Foch should really have all the powers he needed. He said that the British public entirely believed in General Foch, as proved by the way in which his appointment had been received in the Press. Of course if General Foch should put the British Army in great peril, Field-Marshal Haig would appeal to his own Government, and no paper which could be drawn up could prevent this. Consequently, there was no objection to some words being put in to this effect. Unless he had the necessary power, however, General Foch would prove worse than useless. He said he would much like to hear the views of the American Generals on the subject, more particularly as General Bliss and General Pershing now had a special claim to attention, since the Army of

the United States of America would be fighting side by side with their Allies under President Wilson's recent decision."

The ensuing discussion will give an idea of the different points of view of those who took part in the Conference:—

"GENERAL PERSHING said that it appeared to him that we had now reached a point in the War where entire co-operation of the Allied Armies should be assured. As a matter of principle, he knew no way to ensure such co-operation except by a single command. It was impossible for two or three Commanders-in-Chief, whose Commands were spread over such a huge front, by themselves to co-ordinate their activities unless the Armies were under one head. The experiments in this direction had already gone far enough. They had proved completely that co-ordination was impossible. Each General had his own responsibilities to think of. Success from now onwards would depend upon the Allies having a single command."

After this speech and another by General Bliss which gave to my proposal the powerful support of the two American Generals, Haig and Wilson saw that the Conference was not satisfied with leaving matters where they were, and that an extension of the Doullens arrangement was inevitable. Haig after consultation with Wilson then said:—

"he was in entire agreement with what General Pershing said. There should be only one Head in France. His own instructions from the British Government were to take his ideas of strategy from the French Commander-in-Chief, although he was responsible for the safety of the British Army. Consequently he had always, subject, of course, to the orders of the British Government, looked to the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army for his strategical ideas. It would be very easy to insert in the agreement what General Foch required, and he thought that General Wilson's draft was satisfactory. What was really needed, however, was that the Commanders-in-Chief should work whole-heartedly and willingly in the closest co-operation with General Foch."

It was news to me that Haig was of opinion "there should be only one Head in France," and that he had "looked to the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army for his strategical ideas." It would have saved much tribulation and loss had he made it clear both in 1917 and in the early months of 1918.

M. Clemenceau then read a draft of a new agreement based on proposals made by General Wilson. Ultimately the following resolution was adopted:—



"The arrangement for the co-ordination of the Higher Command on the Western Front, concluded at Doullens on the 26th March, 1918, should be superseded by the following arrangement:—

General Foch is charged by the British, French and American Governments with the co-ordination of the action of the Allied Armies on the Western Front. To this end all powers necessary to secure effective realisation are conferred on him. The British, French and American Governments for this purpose entrust to General Foch the strategic direction of military operations. The Commanders-in-Chief of the British, French and American Armies have full control of the tactical employment of their forces. Each Commander-in-Chief will have the right of appeal to his Government if in his opinion the safety of his Army is compromised by any order received from General Foch."

This Resolution carried matters much further than the Doullens plan. Foch was for the first time entrusted by the British, French and American Governments with the strategic direction of military operations and all the necessary powers were conferred upon him for that purpose.

As General Bliss afterwards wrote in his account of the Beauvais Conference:—

"It resulted in the nearest approximation to giving General Foch supreme command that was ever attained."

There is no better illustration of the difference made by the Beauvais Resolution in the development of the campaign than the discussion which took place at an Allied Conference held at Abbeville on 1st and 2nd May, 1918,\* when Signor Orlando, on behalf of the Italian Army, raised the question of whether General Foch's functions as Commander-in-Chief should extend to the Italian Army and said that although he was prepared to accept the application of the Beauvais arrangement to the Italian troops that were in France at that time, he claimed that the Doullens agreement alone was applicable to the Army in Italy, as that gave Foch the right to co-ordinate but not to command. As a commentary on the Beauvais decision and an exposition of the difference it made on the powers of Foch this discussion is worth perusing.

Foch was not altogether satisfied with this resolution. He thought that unless he had the power to issue orders to the two Commanders-in-Chief there would always be trouble in the interpretation even of the extended powers now conferred upon him. There was, according to him, no such office known to the Army as co-ordinator. In his characteristic way he said: "What am I? I am Monsieur Foch, *très bien connu* (with a smile), *mais toujours Monsieur Foch.*"

\* Appendix (Abbeville Conference).

I saw the force of his criticisms, and having regard to what happened after Doullens I thought his apprehensions were justified. I explained to him the difficulties I had, not only with Haig, but with national susceptibilities at home; but I promised that I would do my best to secure the assent of the British War Cabinet to making him *Général-en-Chef* and I asked him whether that would satisfy him. He said: "That is a different matter altogether. If that were done there would be no more difficulties." On my return to England I sounded my colleagues and when I thought them ready for the suggestion I placed the whole matter before the Cabinet, and after some discussion they agreed to the appointment of Foch as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces. Unity of command was thus, after a great many vicissitudes, completely established, and for the first time the whole of the forces of the Allies on the Western Front were consolidated and united, not merely for defence, but for the great return blow that brought the War to a triumphant end. The disaster of the 21st March had saved the Allies. Nothing else would have made it possible for us to overcome the natural susceptibilities and suspicions which had to be removed in order to enable us to achieve that unity which was essential to victory.

When Briand and I first made the experiment in unity of command in the spring of 1917, we encountered the resistance of two men, Haig and Robertson, whose most outstanding faculty was stubbornness. Their abilities were average, their obstinacy was abnormal. That type, in a narrow trench which had to be held at all costs, would have been invaluable; commanding a battlefield that embraced three continents their vision was too limited and too fixed. It was not a survey, but a stare. It was not that they were incapable of seeing anything except what was straight in front of them, it was that they refused to look at anything else and counted it a dereliction of duty to turn their eyes in any other direction.

In politics, in medicine and in religion one often meets the man with the fixed idea. Whatever the evil, there is but one remedy. It is the cure-all. Every other idea is a side-show. It is a waste of time and energy to pursue them. It distracts attention and devotion from the saving principle. I discovered in the War that the military profession is no exception to the rule.

At the time of the Nivelle offensive in the spring of 1917, public sentiment in Britain was not in the least enamoured of the idea that a French General should have the supreme direction of a joint operation. Unfortunately, the risk of the experiment was not vindicated by the result. The operation failed on that wing of the wide battlefield where the Commander-in-Chief personally directed the attack. He was discredited in the eyes of his own Army, which mutinied against his leadership, and he was finally dismissed from his command by the Ministry which appointed him. This was an

unhappy precedent to commend unity under a French General. On a smaller scale the experiment was repeated when six French Divisions were placed under Haig at the Battle of Flanders. But even that limited effort at unity achieved nothing which served to recommend the idea of the united command. No one in urging his plan for a Generalissimo could point with pride and confidence to the sodden battlefields of Flanders and say, "See what unity has accomplished here."

There was the additional difficulty that the War had not yet thrown up a victorious General. With the exception of the Marne there had been no clear victory on the Allied side which had produced any decisive results, and there were many competitive claimants for the honour of that triumph.

Pétain never gave me the idea of a General whose personality or genius could lead huge armies to victory in a war where, at the right moment, a crashing attack was essential to defeat your formidable enemy. He was an able man and a good soldier. But he was essentially a Fabius Cunctator. He was careful and cautious even to the confines of timidity. His *métier* after the 1917 mutinies was that of a head nurse in a home for cases of shell-shock. The French Army after three years of unspeakable horror culminating in the shambles of the Chemin des Dames badly needed such attention. Pétain did it well and successfully. There is no other French General who could have done it as well. He did not irritate the frayed nerves of his patients with constant alarms and offensives. Nevertheless, Foch's summing-up of him to Poincaré will be acknowledged by those who knew him as accurate and fair: "As second in command, carrying out orders, Pétain is perfect, but he shrinks from responsibility, and is not fitted for a Commander-in-Chief." Both Poincaré and Clemenceau constantly complained of his pessimism. He was inclined to dwell on the gloomiest possibilities of a situation. Poincaré, in his Diary, said that in the German offensive Pétain was "defeatist." He would have made an ineffective Commander-in-Chief for Allied Armies confronted with the problems of 1918.

The French would not have agreed to the choice of Haig for the chief command of both armies. The fighting was on their soil. They could not have left to a foreign General the emancipation of French soil from the invader. Moreover, their Army was still much the largest. Apart from that they had no confidence in Haig's qualifications for such a position. They regarded him as a stout and stubborn fighter on conventional lines. But they knew only too well that he was devoid of the intellectual and personal gifts that make great commanders. He did not possess imagination, breadth or magnetism. For these reasons his name was never mentioned as a possible Generalissimo.

Who was left? Foch was known to be the ablest French General,



but he had been withdrawn from the battle front for over a year. His intervention and guidance in the first Battle of Ypres had been superb. But the terrible losses sustained by the French in the Artois offensive in 1915, for which Foch was entirely responsible, temporarily destroyed the confidence hitherto reposed in his genius. His ruthlessness and his traditional belief in the policy of attack had cost his country dearly in French lives. The prolonged and bloody Battle of the Somme, when Foch commanded the French Army, showed considerable generalship which won much ground without undue losses, but it did nothing to recapture his prestige, for it accomplished nothing which satisfied French opinion. This offensive once more disappointed the hopes of a break-through. I saw Foch during that battle and I thought him a subdued and somewhat dejected remnant of the ebullient and triumphant Foch I first met. A severe motoring accident had shaken him badly. It took him months to recover fully. When his vigour was restored he was made principal military adviser to the French War Office in succession to a General of no distinction, General Roques. I remember talking to Albert Thomas about Foch about this date and he said to me: "*Foch est vidé et épuisé.*" This remark exaggerated Foch's physical condition but it fairly represented the general view formed of Foch's prospects at that period of the War. When a man of over 65 has been violently flung on to a windscreen you may well doubt his fitness to command in the field armies numbering millions at a critical stage in the history of the greatest war ever waged. He did not recover his old resilience and verve until the late autumn. Then they came back with the swell of a spring tide. When he accompanied the French Premier and myself to Italy after the Caporetto disaster I noticed for the first time that the dominating Foch of the first years of the War had sprung into full life and vigour once more. His inspiration vivified the Conference and propelled action.

After the Beauvais Conference of 3rd April was finished we returned to England the same day. As a mere matter of personal reminiscence I may here record two slight incidents which occurred on the return journey of the British Delegation. The Conference lasted till late in the afternoon, and as there was nowhere on the road where we could expect to have a meal, we decided to picnic on the roadside.

Clemenceau had brought a luncheon basket for himself and his Staff, but having lunched with the President before we arrived, he dispensed with his rations and passed them on to us. We feasted sumptuously on the *charcuterie* which had been provided for the Tiger. Mr. Winston Churchill, who had been to Headquarters discussing the replenishment of lost munitions, had joined us on the road. When we reached Boulogne, the town was in complete darkness, for there was a German air raid impending. We saw long

columns of reinforcements marching silently in the dark, and when we came to the quay we witnessed the disembarkation of a number of young "kilties" about 19 years old from the troop-ships by the light of a single torch. We got on to a "P" boat, a new craft invented to search for and to chase submarines. As soon as we left the harbour the bombs began to fall. There was not a light visible in the Channel, but half-way across there was a sudden illumination which lit up the water almost from shore to shore. A mile or two away we saw a ship which seemed to be on fire from stem to stern. Hull and halyards were all marked out in white flames. They had been smeared with a substance which illumed without burning. This was one of the new devices for detecting submarines that sought to take advantage of dark nights to thread their way between the vigilant greyhounds that were watching the tracks of shipping along our coasts.

Three days after the Beauvais Conference the first German push of the great offensive was arrested. It had failed to attain its strategic aim, but it was the most notable tactical success scored on either side on the Western Front, since the war of movement came to an end in 1914. Not one of the Allied offensives of 1915-16-17 can compare with it in the results achieved. In the course of little over a fortnight, the enemy had penetrated our lines on a 60-mile front and advanced a maximum depth of 40 miles beyond our front trenches. He had captured 975 of our guns, and inflicted on us 188,000 casualties, including 79,000 prisoners and missing. And he had achieved this result when his total forces on the Western Front were approximately equal in combatant strength to those of the Allies, and his gun-power was less. Compare that with the Allied offensives in Champagne, on the Chemin des Dames, at Vimy, on the Somme, and at Passchendaele, when we had a heavy superiority in numbers. On the Somme, as a result of five months' fighting, we advanced a maximum depth of about seven miles, capturing 125 guns and 40,000 prisoners at a cost of 498,000 casualties to ourselves, not counting the French. At Passchendaele we spent nearly four months in winning five miles of useless and quaggy desolation—later to be abandoned in a single night without striking a blow—and in capturing 74 guns and 34,000 prisoners, at a cost of 400,000 casualties.

The total German casualties in their great March offensive, including their fight against the French, were 220,000. Even if their returns are held to be incomplete, and a percentage added to that total, the price paid for this success still remains far below what we paid on the Somme and in Flanders for gains which by comparison with those won in the German offensive had been quite trivial. All the same, for all practical purposes, this brilliant achievement was a costly failure. Amiens had not been captured. A gap had not been

effected between the British and the French. The Allied loss had been repaired. The German Army with its diminishing reserves had acquired another useless salient to defend.

Ludendorff is entitled to claim that "it was a brilliant feat." I do not think anyone who has read fairly the history of the War can challenge his further statement that the Germans had accomplished what the English and French had not succeeded in doing, and that in the fourth year of the War. But the fact that the British Army sustained a heavy defeat must not blind us to what it accomplished in the face of great difficulties. The German Army had every advantage which good leadership could confer, the British Army was placed under every disadvantage in which bad generalship could land any troops. The Germans had prepared their plans with the greatest skill, they had worked them out with the greatest care. They massed their troops so that they should hit our line with the greatest force that could be concentrated at the front of attack, they assembled their reserves as close up to their first attacking troops as they conveniently could, so that no time should be lost in throwing them in wherever the need came either for further pressure or to relieve exhausted troops. When more reserves were needed either to overcome unexpected resistance or to exploit an unexpected advance, arrangements had been already made for bringing them up with the utmost celerity from other parts of the line. If the attack did not achieve its ultimate objective it was not through any lack of preparation on the part of the High Command.

What about the British Army? Although Headquarters knew the attack was coming, the preparations for defence were of the most slipshod character. As to preparing for counter-attack, which is an essential part of defence, it was bound to be ineffective for lack of reserves; and as for a counter-offensive, no means had been provided for it. Most of our troops were massed on sectors which, weeks before the 21st March, G.H.Q. knew were not then to be seriously attacked, whilst the 42 miles of a line which, they were abundantly warned, would with the Third Army receive the first impact of an immense force, were lightly held. Most of our reserves were in and behind that part of the line which was the remotest from the battlefield. Although G.H.Q. was warned three weeks in advance that the greatest concentration of the enemy was opposite the weakest part of our line and that the shock would come there, it made no effort to strengthen it or to move any more of our reserves behind it. Haig rejected a proposal for building up a General Reserve of 30 divisions, two-thirds of which would have been drawn from other armies and which would have been available to support our hard-pressed troops when attacked by overwhelming numbers. And we made no other arrangement for assistance from the French which could be termed a working plan for mutual support.



Taking the whole front the opposing forces were substantially equal, with a real mechanical superiority on the Allied side. But we so disposed our forces that for the first four days of the battle the enemy had an advantage of three or four to one in men and an even greater superiority in guns, most of our men and guns being kept at the extreme end of our line from the battle-field. The Official History tries to persuade us that Haig was right in keeping most of his army as far away as possible from the area of the impending battle. It seems a novel theory that the further reinforcements are away from the fight the more useful they are when they are needed! They are much more helpful when they are three days' journey from the battlefield than if they are only a few miles behind! How these great Generals presume on the ignorance of the common man!

The first reserves only came into action after our lines had been broken through by an overwhelming weight of men and guns. Our soldiers were never given a fighting chance of winning. Under such conditions there are plenty of historical precedents for the bravest men being seized with panic and running away from the battle. My great fear during all these anxious days was the recollection of Napoleon's saying at St. Helena, in explaining the *saue qui peut* of Waterloo: "The bravest armies have all in turn been seized with panic, and the question then is whether you can rally them in time before they disperse." In the Battle of Amiens there was confusion, disorder, retreat, a muddle of broken divisions, but there was no panic, no *saue qui peut*. There was no flight of terror-stricken mobs escaping from pursuing Death. They never ceased fighting. They sought opportunities for resistance right to the end. When out-flanked or driven from one position they looked out for another where they could make a stand. Officers rarely experienced any difficulty in lining them up for a fight whenever they found a suitable position where they could temporarily hold up the enemy. Their trouble was that there were so few prepared positions which they could occupy. An entrenchment or machine-gun emplacement which only existed on a notice-board was not a defensible position. And the shallow groove of spitlocked trenches was no shelter against artillery or rifle fire. G.H.Q. however could not afford to provide them with anything better, and concentrated the labour resources on favoured sectors which were not likely to be assailed. So the soldiers of the Fifth Army—the outcasts of Passchendaele—had to choose some convenient hump to shield them from the German guns whilst they were doing their best to delay the advance of the German infantry. The first day the line was ruptured, but the spirit of the troops was never broken to the end. When men were severed from their own units they joined up with others whom they found putting up a fight to hold up the German advance. Odds and ends of men who were not in the fighting ranks at all—engineers, labour

companies, cooks, servants—picked up rifles, lined trenches, formed up little battalions and brigades of their own with the help of men who in the confusion of such a battle had strayed from their own units. The American engineers, who were helping us to throw up defences around Amiens, threw down their engineering tools, picked up their rifles and fought with valour beyond praise, side by side with an improvised gathering of strays, to arrest the enemy advance. There were many cases where the victorious masses of the enemy were held up by the heroic resistance of individual battalions and companies here and there on the battlefield, so that time might be gained for the meagre reserves that were tardily spared to creep up before the enemy could reach his final objective. This is not an imaginative picture, painted from reports made by British general officers anxious to minimise the episodes of the defeat. It is confirmed by much testimony from German eye-witnesses. It is worth quoting a few extracts from an account written by a distinguished German General,\* compiled from reports which came to him. This is taken from his record of the opening day's fighting, March 21st:—

“In spite of the mist, the English artillery, firing by the map, yet managed to render good service to the infantry in their desperate struggle, and in many cases hung on till the last moment. The guns might well fall into the hands of the Germans, after they had been fought right up to the time when they were under German machine-gun fire! The battery officers with their crews then threw in their lot with the infantry, and helped to reinforce their weakened fronts. . . . The sturdy resistance of the English brought it about that already on the afternoon of the 21st the 39th Division (Second Line) had to join in the battle of the Lindequist sector. . . . The nearer the 126th Regiment gets to the Lagnicourt-Louverval-Daignies road, the stronger becomes the enemy artillery fire. After crossing this road, the right wing of the 3rd Company is forced to suffer heavily from the fire of an English machine-gun nest.”

On March 22nd:—

“Those in front who had sought and found in shell-holes or in trenches which they dug themselves, some shelter against the artillery and machine-gun fire of the English . . . had to satisfy themselves with the cold comfort of the bread they had brought with them through the night—the next morning the attack went on. . . . The resistance of the English was much tougher than it had been on the previous day. Hills and hummocks furnish for their innumerable machine-gun nests in and behind their second position the best cover and an excellent field of fire. Only

\* Lieutenant-General Kabisch: “Michael.”

with difficulty, pressing forward with a true contempt for death close behind the front line of the infantry, can the advancing shock batteries of the 2nd Field Artillery Regiment master some of these nests. At 8.30 a.m. the order had to be given to the rather thinned-out front line to dig itself in, in the positions it had reached quite close to the defences of the second English position! Hours pass of quite unbearable waiting. Cowering close to one another, the warriors peer gloomily forward, full of fury that an attack so promisingly begun should have been brought to a standstill. . . .

Fresh artillery preparations and attacks alternate with counter-attacks by the English. The battle wavers hither and thither. Our brave comrades suffer terrible losses. The troops from the rear thrust forward into the fighting line. They too are shot down, without being able to achieve a change in the situation. At 6 p.m. the English along the whole front from Morchies to the Cambrai-Bapaume road renew a powerful counter-offensive. North of Morchies they also send their tanks forward. Bloodily repulsed they retire under fire of the German defences, back to the sunken road Morchies-Ziegelei. . . .

Everywhere, in Morchies, and especially in the sunken road, savage hand-to-hand conflicts take place. Our men gain the victory. . . ."

Here is his description of the fight over an obscure village in the Somme area:—

" . . . The gardens of the village were taken by storm, wire-cutters cleared the way through entanglements, the road dipped, and we were in the village. . . . By evening the 52nd Infantry Regiment succeeded in taking Falvy. . . . Then in face of the fire of enemy artillery and machine-guns the attack was brought to a standstill. At 4.0 in the morning of the 24th March the 12th Grenadier Regiment began the crossing by Bethencourt, but a strong machine-gun fire smote it from the houses of the village. . . ."

March 24th:—

"An English attack was beaten off. The English withdrew, as the mist cleared, into the houses of Bethencourt, about 200 metres distant. From thence they maintained a stubborn, heavy fire against the garrison of the bridge-head. . . ."

March 26th:—

"But the big result cannot be so soon achieved. The English pull themselves together again. A fight comes, in which the situation of the quite isolated 28th Infantry Division, divided into two groups, grows at times very serious. It is attacked in the



morning twilight. The attack against the front and two wings was beaten off with heavy losses for the enemy. On the other hand, the enemy, thrusting forward from Bouchoir, succeeded in pressing back the right flank up to and east of Erches. Parts of this group appeared right behind the division. The batteries standing immediately behind the front line gave rapid fire at point-blank range. The 2nd Section of the 65th Field Artillery Regiment, and 1st and 3rd Batteries of the 55th Foot Artillery succeeded through their fire in compelling the enemy, who were advancing close up to the batteries, to take shelter in the trenches and shell-holes of the Somme position. . . ."

March 26th:—

"In Saulchoy meantime, three companies of the 1st Grenadiers/109 with the 7th Battery of the 14th Field Artillery were fighting independently against repeated fierce English attacks. Midday came. Where was the big success hiding? The battalion had to face the decision, whether to hold out in Saulchoy and defend the place against the thrusting attacks of the English, or to fight its way through in the direction of Erches to rejoin its own forces. It decided to stick in Saulchoy. . . ."

March 26:—

"If the divisions were thus able continually to smash through the constantly renewed resistance of the enemy, they owe thanks for it not least to the accompanying batteries, whose sacrificial help was beyond all praise."

These extracts show clearly enough that the German advance was anything but a walk-over. It was achieved by immense superiority of men and artillery against an unrelenting resistance. When it had proceeded so far that its effective superiority dwindled, it slowed down and stopped. The "obstinate British soldier," to quote Wetzell, had fully justified the quality of "toughness" with which he had been credited. But it is fair to add that the French troops had been worthy of the reputation they had acquired for their skill and gallantry when they dashed into the fight to help the overwhelmed remnants of the Fifth Army.

The German advance was thus delayed until time was given the two Allied Headquarters to make up their minds as to which of them should send the reinforcements that were needed. Great losses were inflicted on the Germans so that they found the immense reserves they had massed behind their lines were insufficient to crush and sweep away this disordered assortment of tough British soldiers from all sorts of battalions and services who would not run away to let the enemy through in time.

In the end Amiens was saved—the Haig-Pétain prospect of a British Army rolled up to the north and the French Army rolled up to the south (which was also Ludendorff's plan) never materialised. There was no gap made between the British and French Armies and the main purpose of the first great German push had been thwarted. This was achieved by the unbeatable fortitude of the ordinary British soldier and the fighting officer who led him. Whoever was responsible for the retreat, they were blameless. By their undaunted valour they redressed the defects of their superiors. It was a soldiers' battle. The credit and the honour were entirely theirs. Wetzell was right in warning Ludendorff not to risk his last chance of restoring the fortunes of the Central Powers on the hope that, profiting by the strategical clumsiness and tactical stupidity of British Generals, he could crush the staying powers of the British soldier.

But the great offensive was by no means over. The first onrush had been checked, but the losses inflicted on the Allies had been heavier than any sustained by them within an equal period in any single battle on the Western Front since the beginning of the War. There were other great attacks coming, other great battles to be fought, other great defeats to be sustained, other heavy losses to be endured. When the Allies had survived this period of discomfiture, there was the problem of converting defeat into decisive victory and of driving the Germans in headlong retreat out of the country they had occupied for four years. The Germans for over three years had repelled every effort to dislodge them from positions so skilfully engineered that they successfully held them even against an enemy with a superiority of 50 per cent. in numbers. Each year these positions had been strengthened by every device of which military engineers were capable. Could they be stormed now when the Allies could not at best anticipate a superiority in numbers comparable with that which they enjoyed in 1916 and 1917? The Russian collapse and the Brest-Litovsk Treaty had released so many German divisions that the expected reinforcements of American troops could not sufficiently redress the balance to give the preponderance that the Allies possessed during the years of the Somme, of the Chemin des Dames and of Passchendaele. Was there any hope in these circumstances of securing a decision in 1918? At that date I met no one, military or civilian, who believed it possible. Any optimism which any of them felt earlier had vanished. No one quite realised the change that was effected when the armies of the West were placed under one Commander, and he the one man with the quality of military genius on the Allied side. We were soon to perceive the difference it made in the effective striking force of the French and British Armies.

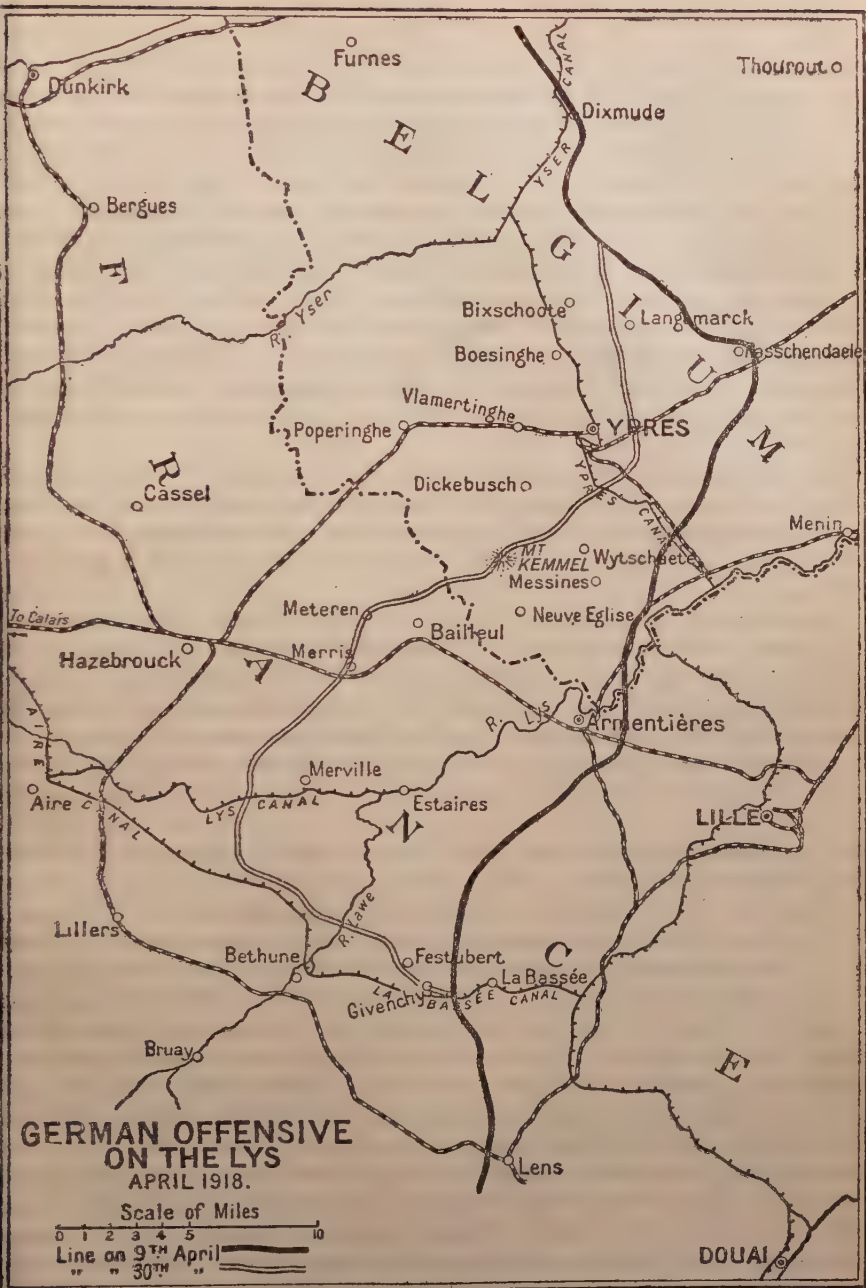
## CHAPTER LXXIX (*continued*)

### BEAUVAIS AND THE CAMPAIGN OF THE NORTH

#### 2. THE BATTLE OF THE LYS

LUDENDORFF came to the conclusion by the 1st of April that he could not make real progress in the direction of Amiens and that the time had come to carry out another part of his plan, and strike a blow at another point of the British line. He chose the plain of the Lys—a variant of the original German plan for a thrust on the Flanders Front towards Hazebrouck and St. Omer, to which the code name “St. George” had been given by the High Command. This secondary version was called by the Germans “Georgette.” The part of the line at which he first struck was held by a Portuguese division. A good deal of unfair derision has been cast on the Portuguese troops for the feebleness of their defence. Some time before this attack I saw a battalion of Portuguese soldiers marching to the front. As far as the rank and file were concerned they appeared to me to be of excellent quality—stocky, well-built, and of smart and soldierly appearance. But their officers were obviously not equal in stamina or efficiency to their men. They had either been ill-chosen or lacked the necessary training. Wellington found that the Portuguese peasant made a first-rate soldier when disciplined and led by good officers: many of them drawn from our own veteran army. The victory of Busaco was largely due to the fine resistance they offered to some of the best troops of the *Grande Armée*, led by one of Napoleon’s most famous Marshals. Their officers in this war, whatever one may think of their intrinsic merits, had never received the training which fitted them for leadership in a great war. Moreover, the Portuguese contingent had suffered recently from the effects of political changes in their own country. The Ministry that had brought Portugal into the War had been overthrown. Their successors were not over-zealous in its prosecution. The result was that the little Portuguese Army in France had been let down during the past few months in recruits and equipment—worst of all in encouragement. But even if they had been the best officers and most efficiently equipped divisions in the field, they could not, in the circumstances in which they were placed, have put up a successful resistance against so formidable an attack. There were in the Portuguese Army a certain number of officers and men who were in





Stanford, London

sympathy with the point of view held by the new Minister in Lisbon. They were against the War. But that was not the sole reason of their flight. An incomprehensible piece of carelessness on the part of our Army Command was directly responsible for what happened. General Horne, the Commander of the Second Army, being warned that the next general attack would come in that sector, decided to withdraw the Portuguese Corps from the line and substitute two British divisions. Foolishly, he only withdrew one Portuguese division (the second) without substituting a British division and then left a forward position, which had been held by a corps of two divisions, to be defended by only one of the two Portuguese divisions, with a brigade of the other division in reserve. It was intended to withdraw these on the 9th when the two British divisions would take their place. The attack came suddenly before the change had been effected. What followed was inevitable with any troops.

The Portuguese were taken completely by surprise when they were about to leave. They were subjected to a heavy bombardment and an attack by masses of German troops who outnumbered them considerably. They broke, and no doubt their rout became a headlong flight.

But it is rather hard on a small nation, which has a long and honoured record for valour and intrepidity on sea and land which enabled them for centuries to maintain the independence of their mountains against a powerful military neighbour and to become the pioneers of Western exploration in unknown seas and lands, that they should have to bear the stain of reproach for a defeat which was entirely attributable to the crass stupidity of a General from another race.

The British division on either side of the Portuguese had their flanks uncovered, and a retreat along a considerable front became inevitable. The Germans penetrated a distance of six miles in a single day. The battle extended on a wider front to the right and left. The enemy was aiming at the only railway from South Flanders behind the British Front. Its capture would have been serious. It would have very gravely hampered the defence of the British Front by making it difficult to bring British and French reinforcements up rapidly to the point of attack. Fortunately, on our right flank, the German attack on Givenchy completely failed. Had it succeeded, the Germans might have accomplished what they had already failed to achieve when they made their first great attack south of Arras. They would have turned the flank of the British forces and have been able to start rolling them up. But the fierce German onslaught at this point was driven back with great loss owing to the magnificent resistance put up by the 55th West Lancashire Division, under General Jeudwine. It was one of the finest feats of the War

and contributed to a considerable extent to the failure of the great German offensive. Lancashire has good reason to be proud of the part played by its troops in these battles—the stand made by the Lancasters during the attack on the Fifth Army, which helped so much to delay the German advance in March, and the resistance of the Lancastrians at Givenchy which thwarted one of the chief aims of German strategy in April.

But although the German attack failed at this critical point they advanced with alarming strides at other points on that front. At first it was thought that the attack was only a demonstration, and as such was reported to the Cabinet, who were informed that our front was strongly entrenched. By the next day the reports from G.H.Q. stated that the attack was “more important” than had at first been thought. The reports we received from Headquarters as to the progress of the battle called to mind those first optimistic reports that came of the battle of March 21st. The first day or two of the Battle of Amiens there was “no cause for anxiety.” Two days later our only hope was to let the Germans through and retreat towards the north. Here also we had the same swing of the pendulum of hope and panic. One moment the attack was only a feint, then G.H.Q. dashed to the other extreme of pessimistic foreboding and came to the conclusion that the rapid advance of the Germans placed the Channel Ports in imminent jeopardy. The Cabinet were naturally anxious when these latter reports reached them and decided to impress on Clemenceau that they considered it essential that the French should treat our portion of the line as part of their battle front. We also resolved that “if we were satisfied on this point, the less the Generals were interfered with the better.”

When Foch heard what had happened, he immediately dashed off to our G.H.Q. He did not quite share our apprehensions and he was very loth to part with any of the reserves which he was building up for his counter-stroke. He, however, promised French help. Our C.I.G.S. was satisfied with this undertaking. But even on the second day the reports did not indicate any overwhelming danger. The weight behind the offensive was not great. It was stated that the Germans had only eight divisions in the attack and our flanks were reported to be holding well.

When this offensive started Foch had only just received his commission as Commander-in-Chief of the three Allied Armies on the Western Front. Until he received his appointment he had not been in a position to give the necessary orders for the formation of a reserve. Now he acted promptly, and ordered the movement of five French divisions in support of the British Army.

In view of the Press and Parliamentary attack made on the Government at the instigation of Sir Frederick Maurice it is interesting to quote the report given to the Cabinet by him as



D.M.O. on April 10th on the comparative numbers of the German and Allied infantry on the Western Front at that date.

"The Director of Military Operations gave some particulars as to the relative strengths of the Allied and enemy armies at the present time on the Western Front. Reckoned in divisions, the enemy had 199 divisions compared with our 167. Assuming the enemy casualties to be about 200,000 they would now have 1,370,000 infantry. The six or seven divisions which had been brought across from Russia since the beginning of the battle might be regarded as compensating for their casualties."

This was an astonishing calculation. Seven divisions, even if they were complete, would not number more than 63,000 infantry. How could they compensate for losses aggregating 200,000 men?

"On the Allied side, the French had brought in two divisions, and we had brought in one, but five of ours, and the Portuguese division, had been knocked out, which reduced the Allied rifle strength to 1,450,000 (a superiority, be it noted, of 80,000 men in infantry alone over the Germans).

The Director of Military Operations was of opinion that the enemy, in anticipation of this offensive, had prepared drafts to replace all casualties. They had 400,000 drafts available before the offensive started. In addition, it was possible for them to draw on their divisions in the East to the extent of 100,000 drafts. Moreover, the Germans had taken all their troops that were serving in Macedonia and in Italy, which proved conclusively that they were concentrating every ounce of strength on the present battle. Against this, the French had 250,000 in depots, and we had 200,000, including the men returning from leave. We had sent to France, since the 21st of March, 1918, 110,000 infantry and 20,000 to 30,000 others, over and above the men returning from leave.\*

It was mentioned that, as regards the thinning of the divisions on the Russian Front, this might be counterbalanced by 100,000 United States troops due to arrive shortly in France."

Even this favourable report on the comparative strength of the rival forces was confined to infantry. It did not take into account our decided superiority in both men and material, in guns, aeroplanes and tanks, which had been increased since March 21st, and it certainly ignored altogether the important circumstance that our men were much better fed. The military importance of this last factor was revealed during these two offensives by two striking facts.

\* That meant over 200,000 men.

The first was that the advance of the German infantry was seriously delayed by their raiding of captured stores which contained rations with which the German soldiers had not been acquainted for many months—either in quantity or in quality. The second was that when the influenza epidemic, which swept over the world and caused more deaths than even the Great War, reached the German trenches, the inferior nourishment of the troops made them more vulnerable than the well-nourished British troops to the ravages of a specially malignant germ. Their casualties from this disease were therefore exceptionally heavy.

At the same meeting of the Cabinet the Secretary for War reported that our total estimated casualties in the great battle between March 21st and April 6th were 150,000. Our losses had been already made up by the men we sent to France since the 21st March and those which had been brought from Italy.

Foch never took the same serious view of this offensive as he did of the March attack. The latter had taken the Germans weeks of elaborate preparation. They had brought 63 divisions close up to the front of attack. They had massed behind their attacking troops thousands of guns with huge ammunition dumps, new aerodromes and hospitals, all prepared for months in contemplation of a gigantic offensive in one definite area. In the Lys offensive there were no apparent preparations for a great attack. There were eight German divisions in the first assault with no great reserves immediately behind them. There is considerable evidence in favour of the view that this offensive was originally only a limited attack on a weak part of our line intended to attract French and British reserves from the zone where the next great offensive was to be propelled. To this extent Haig's first estimate of the attack as a demonstration was justified. Foch held the same view. That is why he never lost his head when the offensive was an unexpected success owing to the Portuguese episode. He was reluctant to play the German game by sending more French divisions to the north than were absolutely necessary to prevent the Germans from breaking through to the Channel Ports. The Germans were enticed out of their original plan by the ease with which they pushed through the gap created by the Portuguese retirement. The result was that an offensive which was intended as a bluff to frighten the Allies into withdrawing their reserves developed into a great battle, with the capture of the Channel Ports as its ultimate objective. The Germans brought up their reserves from the south to exploit the advantage they had won. They were caught in a trap which they had laid for the Allies. More reserves were spent in attack than in defence. Foch had refused to walk into the pitfall dug for him by Ludendorff, but the German Commander himself, in a moment of exaltation produced by his easy victory over one Portuguese division, had tumbled

headlong into his own pit. He was not the first military leader to be led to his doom by a flying foe.

The lure of the Channel Ports was a dazzling one. Apart from the crippling effect which the occupation of these ports by the Germans would have on the transport of our troops and material to France and also on our anti-submarine campaign in the Channel, it would have its moral value for the Germans in the dismay and disarray which would be created in England. Had the ports been captured the Channel could have been closed for our through shipping for London; in itself a serious matter. The occupation of Calais and of Cape Gris-Nez by the Germans would for the first time have placed England within range of German guns. Paris was being bombarded by a gun that fired its shells from a distance of over 50 miles. Naval guns could have fired across the Channel. It is for this reason that the second German offensive made an almost deeper impression on the public mind in our country than even the first. The Germans at Amiens would be bad enough, but the Germans in possession of territory in view of our own shores was an infinitely more alarming prospect. And as their Army pressed forward with a thrust that seemed for three weeks to be irresistible—one well-known town after another falling into their hands (Armentières, Merville, Neuve Chapelle, and Bailleul were much more familiar names in Britain than Montdidier, Bapaume, Villers-Bretonneux, or even Amiens)—a certain alarm spread throughout the country. It was then that Haig penned his famous appeal to his troops, in which he said that they “must fight with their backs to the wall.” By the 12th April he was profoundly disturbed by the position and his uneasiness was communicated to the Cabinet at home. Hence the representations they made to the French Government as to the urgent need for French reinforcements. Foch, however, maintained his composure and took not only a calm, but a hopeful view of the German advance across the Lys. He held strictly to the view that the Germans were playing the Allied game and he resolutely declined to be fussed into having his ulterior plans upset because the Germans were wasting their reserves in gaining futile and costly victories in a direction where he was convinced they could be stopped before they reached anything vital. In adhering to this opinion he took risks, but war is always a choice of risks, and sound strategy and tactics consist in knowing the right risk to take. He sent five French divisions to the north. Later on he dispatched a few more, but by that time the Germans had withdrawn their best reserves from the south in order to exploit a blunder—this time their own. He was fully justified by the event. The Lys offensive destroyed the German scheme of a second offensive towards Amiens. Foch maintained that the Germans had no chance of breaking through to the ports. At best their numbers were only equal to those commanded by the



Allies. In the March offensive, when the Germans were thoroughly prepared and the Allies were not—when the latter were weakened by distracted counsels amongst the Commanders—they only penetrated a maximum of 40 miles into the Allied lines and were then stopped. There was small chance for such a penetration with weaker forces and hasty preparation. And the terrain was much less suitable for attack. In the north they could be held up by inundations and the plain of the Lys was boggy at that time of the year. Hindenburg describes the difficulties experienced by the German troops in their advance:—

“Our storm troops rose from their muddy trenches on the Lys front from Armentières to La Bassée. Of course they were not disposed in great waves, but mostly in small detachments and diminutive columns, which waded through the morass which had been upheaved by shells and mines, and either picked their way towards the enemy lines between deep shellholes filled with water, or took the few firm causeways. . . . It was only with the greatest difficulty that a few ammunition wagons were brought forward behind the infantry.”

As they advanced further their troubles increased:—

“The difficulties of communication across the Lys Valley which had to be overcome by our troops attacking from the south had been like a chain round our necks. Ammunition could only be brought up in quite inadequate quantities, and it was only thanks to the booty the enemy had left behind on the battlefield that we were able to keep our troops properly fed.”

In these positions:—

“Our infantry had suffered extremely heavily in their fight with the enemy machine-gun nests, and their complete exhaustion threatened unless we paused in our attack for a time.”

Their losses were much heavier than those sustained by the defenders and they were losing heavily in their picked officers and men who were irreplaceable. This was the vindication of Foch's strategy. German reserves and drafts were being wasted in an offensive that consumed valuable time of which they had not a week to spare and weakened their reserve for future efforts beyond the possibility of redemption.

After a short respite to recuperate and reinforce their exhausted troops the Germans renewed their attacks mostly towards the north. They brought in fresh divisions from the south and for a time their

attacks once more prospered. It was then that General Plumer took over the whole front of defence from La Bassée to the sea. His first measure was reluctantly to withdraw all the troops from the Passchendaele salient and occupy the line held by the British troops before that costly battle was ever fought. This step not only increased the reserves at his disposal but it upset the German plans on the extreme north of our front. They had contemplated making a great coup by pinching out the salient and capturing the divisions that garrisoned it. The evacuation was completed the night before the German attack, without their knowledge. The worthless territory which it had taken four months' terrible fighting and 400,000 casualties to capture was abandoned in a single night. The conquest was a nightmare, the relinquishment of it was a relief and an inspiration. When the encircling troops reached Langemarck they found nothing before them to capture but the muddy triangle on which the British Army had been flogged to tatters for five months.

It was at this stage that Foch sent me a personal message which was significant of the degree of confidence he felt in the outcome of the struggle. In course of conversation with him at Beauvais I asked him whose hand he would prefer playing at that time—his own or Ludendorff's. He promised to let me know as soon as he had authority to look into the whole position and time to weigh the resources of the rival armies. That was on April 4th. On the 17th I received a message from him that "if he had to choose between playing his own hand and that of Ludendorff's, then if he had to get to Berlin he would prefer Ludendorff's hand, but as his mission was to beat Ludendorff, he would prefer his own."

But the battle of the north was by no means over. Whatever was the original intention of the German High Command in the initiation of this attack it had now developed into a major offensive with an objective which reached far beyond the first avowed purpose of eating up the Allied reserves and withdrawing Allied divisions to the northern end of the line where their communications were inferior to those possessed by the enemy. Even at this date their objective was not clearly defined in the minds of the German Commanders. It was rather of the "you never can tell" expectation. The British Army might at last be broken, the Channel Ports might be captured, and at least the French might be forced to send their reserves to the northern end of the front in order to avert disaster—in fact anything might happen when one secured the upper hand over an enemy. With these unexpressed hopes in mind large reinforcements were brought to the attacking force partly from Russia but mostly from France by the process of *roulement*. Gradually they pushed us back in the direction of Hazebrouck. They had already captured the Messines Ridge; they now attacked and took more of the high ground to the north-west. As these conquests overlooked

the plains of the north the situation became graver. Foch under the pressure of these events sent fresh reinforcements from the French Army to relieve some of our hard-pressed divisions. The Germans once more made a desperate effort to widen their left flank by a second attack on the Givenchy Front. It was repulsed with heavy losses by an inferior British force. On the other flank the German push was more successful. Orders were given that the inundations that protected Dunkirk and Calais against an attack from the direction of the Yser should be started.

In the middle of our anxieties the Cabinet received information from the War Office Intelligence which showed that whatever might be our worries, those of the Germans must have been even greater. In this vast struggle an equivalent of 208 German divisions had already been used against the British and the French. Of these 151 had encountered British troops and 57 had engaged the French. The Germans had still 63 divisions available for *roulement* but the British and French had 66. This estimate did not take into account the four divisions of American troops already in the front line, nor did it reckon the American reinforcements, some of which were already completing their training and equipment in France and would have been available in an extreme emergency to fill up depleted divisions. Under our new shipping arrangements, 30,000 a week of young American recruits were pouring into France. There would soon be 40,000 a week. As the attack so far had been entirely on the British Front, our troops had borne most of the brunt. But the Allied reserves were now definitely larger than those which were at the disposal of the Germans. It was therefore a question of increasing this superiority without taking too great risks for the next fortnight. In spite of that vital consideration Foch came to the conclusion after a visit to the battle area that he must spare a few of his reserve divisions for the British Front. The apprehensions felt by the British Commander-in-Chief were naturally a little exaggerated but by no means altogether ill-founded. And the anxiety was primarily his. In the event, the fresh French divisions sent to the north were found to be necessary to stem the fierce German onslaught on the vital bastion above the Yser. The Germans captured the important height of Kemmel Hill from a French division which had replaced a tired British division. But further German progress in that direction was arrested by a combined British and French force. The last German effort to capture the high ground to the north had thus been repelled by a combined French and British force. A French counter-attack had in this decisive battle driven the enemy a mile beyond the line from which he had started. The Germans had put into this fight their last fresh divisions on their Northern Front. Their losses in the battle had been exceptionally heavy.

Meanwhile we had a gratifying testimony to the effect this



diversion of the German forces to an unintended offensive had upon their original plans. The second attack which had been contemplated originally by them—and expected by us—in the direction of Amiens, dwindled into a comparatively small affair where four divisions were employed to capture Villers-Bretonneux and to push the German Front on to the high ground above Amiens. At first it achieved a certain measure of success; it captured Villers-Bretonneux and the Germans came in sight of the spire of the great Cathedral, but there was no weight of numbers behind the onslaught. Their reserves were bogged in the Lys morass. A brilliant counter-attack by combined forces of British and Australians recaptured Villers-Bretonneux.

By the end of the month of April the Germans had come to the conclusion that their great offensive in the north had miscarried as far as its chief aims were concerned and that the time had arrived for calling it off. They had not succeeded in destroying the British Army or in reaching the Channel Ports. They must now turn their attention to the French Army. They had by their conquests added another salient to their fronts and for weeks paid heavy toll to the British artillery that bombarded them from three sides. The Allies were not aware for some time of the difficulties experienced by their redoubtable foe in making any progress across the boggy ground which they had conquered, and fears of a further push still remained to disturb the minds of those who were primarily responsible for organising resistance in this battle area. There were serious discussions amongst the Allies as to what course should be pursued by the British Army if the Germans succeeded in driving us so far back as to make the Channel Ports untenable. Should we fall back on Calais, Boulogne and Dunkirk and prepare for embarkation of troops and material to England or should our Army join the French Army in the south and leave the ports to their fate as the French and ourselves did in 1914? If the military decision were in favour of a retreat to the ports, then preparations would have to be made in time for this eventuality. Enough shipping should be assembled at convenient ports so that they might be available at the shortest notice. Sir Douglas Haig and Sir Henry Wilson were in favour of the latter course. The Admiralty were very insistent that the ports should be held to the last moment. If Calais fell into enemy hands, Dover could no longer be held as a naval base for our submarine operations in the Channel. I understand that Pétain favoured the 1914 precedent—a retreat southwards to join the French Army.

Whilst these discussions were pending a meeting of the Supreme Council was held at Abbeville to decide this issue amongst others. The Generals present were each invited to express their views at a confidential meeting held at the Prefect's House before the Council met officially. Foch took no part in the discussion. When he was

asked to give us his opinion on the matter his only answer was a gruff "*Ne lâchez pas pied*" twice and thrice repeated. He would not even discuss the possibility of a retreat. The Allies must refuse to lift a foot. Every inch of ground must be held. He would answer no contingent questions based on the hypothesis of a forced retreat. Psychologically, it was a fine and stimulating gesture. You cannot fight at your best with a retreating mind.

At that moment when we were discussing the possibility of a German break-through as a problem demanding precautionary measures of a practical kind, the Germans had decided to postpone further operations in Flanders until after they had dealt with the French Army. We know and are very much alive to our own troubles, and for that reason are disposed to exaggerate them. We are not always so conscious of the embarrassments of others, least of all those of our foes, and we either do not suspect their existence or are inclined to mistake their character.

The Battle of the Lys was one of the great strategical blunders of the German High Command. Ludendorff had been warned of the unsuitability of the ground up in the north for a great offensive until the late spring. Nevertheless, he sent the picked divisions of his last army squelching through these water-logged meadows intersected with ditches and drains. He admits that it was with difficulty he could get artillery up to support the infantry and that many divisions had consequently failed to show a disposition to attack. Even food could not be brought up, let alone guns and ammunition. Hungry troops lost time in scrounging for anything to eat. Speed was of the essence of success in such an offensive as he was conducting. In a week's time the March offensive on the Somme had penetrated nearly 20 miles into the British lines. After three weeks' hard fighting on the Lys Front the furthest point of penetration was 12 miles. The German Commander ought to have learnt the lesson of the failure of our attack in Flanders the previous year. That should have taught him that rapid movement of modern armies with their ponderous equipment cannot be achieved in a swamp. It is a strange coincidence that two of the most powerful generals of the War—one British and one German—should have almost destroyed their fine armies by insisting on fighting great battles in a morass. Both were lured by the hope that the moment they captured the high ground beyond the rest would be easy. Had Ludendorff been asked in the summer and autumn of 1917 how he would have liked to see the British Army spend its strength, he could not have chosen a better method for it to throw away its opportunities than the campaign to which it was committed by its own leaders. Had Foch been asked how he would have wished to see the Germans occupy what was left of their immense reserves after the Battle of Amiens, he could not have elected a better plan than to send Ludendorff's best army on what

he once picturesquely described as "a duck's march" in the Flemish lowlands, where celerity of movement was impossible because cannon and ammunition wagons got stuck. That would give him the time he needed to build up a great Allied Reserve for the final crash into the exhausted remnant of the enemy's strength.

Our losses in these two great battles were necessarily heavy, but those of the enemy were much heavier. We are no longer dependent on estimates for the figures of either our own or enemy losses. Official statistics are available on both sides. Ludendorff complains that owing to lack of drafts these losses were unpleasantly felt. On the Allied side American reinforcements were beginning to arrive, and that more than made up the Allied deficit. The Battle of the Lys gave time for the newly arrived Americans to be organised into an effective army.

The German Army was so exhausted and so depleted that it had to take a month to rest and fill up ere it was ready for its next move. That month's respite was invaluable to our Army which had been fighting without cease for six weeks. Meanwhile not only were American troops—mostly fighting men—being carried to France, usually by British ships, at the rate of 250,000 per month, but those already in France were perfecting their training, so that by the time the Germans were ready for their next attack there were five American divisions, each of them treble the strength of a German division, ready to take part in the conflict. What was perhaps even more important was that Foch was given time to develop his plans for the great counter-stroke he was contemplating and to make the necessary preparations for delivering it when the time was ripe.



## CHAPTER LXXIX (*continued*)

### BEAUVAIS AND THE CAMPAIGN OF THE NORTH

#### 3. HOW THE BRITISH PUBLIC FACED DEFEAT

A PROMINENT American who visited this country a few days after the news of the March disaster was astonished at the general composure with which it was received by the British public. There was no sign of panic or even of excitement. That certainly is my recollection of the general attitude of the people. The defeat was regarded as an unfortunate incident inevitable in a prolonged war; it had happened before many a time in our history and the Allies had sustained unpleasant set-backs in this war, but these mishaps were always overcome in the end. No doubt of ultimate victory crept into the region of the British heart. During 1917, the previous year, when I had an occasion to take a journey to Glasgow and Edinburgh, there was a great deal of unrest amongst the Scottish workers and the pacifist movement was growing. During the late spring of 1918 when things were going badly in the north, and the Channel Ports were thought to be in peril, I again visited Scotland. I found a complete change in the attitude and temper of all classes alike. It was visible everywhere—in the streets, in the works, as well as in public assemblies. There was a grim resolve imprinted on the faces of the people. There was very little pacifist talk and the workers were applying themselves to the tasks of the War assiduously without grumble or protest.

At the Sunday service I attended at a Scottish church before going to see Admiral Beatty, the Minister of the Kirk took as his text:—

“Gad, a troop shall overcome him; but he shall overcome at the last.”

That passage from Holy Writ represented faithfully the temper in which the nation met defeat.

I was given two or three illustrations of the change wrought by disaster in the public spirit. I have already set forth in another chapter the difficulties we were experiencing with the Unions in effecting a searching comb-out of their men to provide recruits for the Army. Amongst other Labour organisations, we experienced a reluctance amounting to practical resistance on the part of one of the

most powerful—the Miners' Federation. We had decided to take 50,000 young men out of the mines, but had hitherto failed to secure the effective co-operation of the Union. After the March defeat I invited the miners' leaders to an interview at 10, Downing Street. I was informed that they were still somewhat difficult. I had a map carefully prepared to show the depth of the German penetration on the British Front and the number of the divisions they had massed opposite our lines. Before starting any conversation I asked the leaders to accompany me to examine this map. They studied it with increasing gravity of mien. They saw its implication before I explained it and emphasised what it meant to their comrades in France. When they resumed their seats after a thorough examination of this startling chart, I saw at once that I should experience no further difficulty in securing their assent and assistance. Their chairman, Robert Smillie, was one of the most remarkable Labour leaders of his generation. He was inflexible and indomitable, but he was a sincere patriot and he was deeply moved by the irrefutable testimony of the map as to his country's dire need. He made no further objection to our request and it was evident to all present that he carried with him the judgment and emotion of all his colleagues.

Subsequently when the actual process of combing out in the mines had started, I had alarming appeals, not from the miners themselves, but from the Coal Controller as to the disastrous effect upon the production of coal. One protest entered by the Controller at a Cabinet meeting throws a remarkable light upon the spirit in which the workers faced a national emergency. He came to the War Cabinet to complain that he was encountering considerable trouble in the mines, not on account of the resistance of these men to being thrust into khaki, but because when a miner was taken out of the pit and sent to the Army, his "pals" wanted to join him. He informed us that there were so many incidents of this kind that it was becoming a serious embarrassment to the managers.

## APPENDIX

EXTRACT from a Report of the second Meeting of the Fifth Session of the Supreme War Council, held in the Chambre des Notaires at Abbeville on Thursday, 2nd May, 1918.

M. CLEMENCEAU said that he understood that Signor Orlando was anxious to raise the question of the Beauvais Agreement. This agreement had not been formally presented to the Italian Government for their acceptance. The French, British and American Governments had agreed to nominate General Foch as the soldier in supreme command of the Allied Armies in France subject to certain conditions. General Foch had to this effect a letter of appointment written by M. Poincaré and countersigned by M. Clemenceau. The question was whether General Foch's powers should be extended to Italy, and whether the Italian Government would agree to this extension.

SIGNOR ORLANDO stated that he had already agreed. When the armies fighting in Italy reached the same condition as those fighting in France, Italy agreed to a single General Commanding-in-Chief, and this General should be General Foch.

M. CLEMENCEAU said that this formula was too vague. Who was to judge? He thought that there was no objection to the course proposed, provided always that in the event of General Foch giving an order which the Italian Commander-in-Chief regarded as contrary to the interests of the army under his command he could appeal to his own Government. That proviso existed in the case of the Beauvais Agreement. Further, the agreement concerned the command of the Allied Armies in France only—not in America or Great Britain.

SIGNOR ORLANDO thought that the whole question depended largely on the spirit of accord existing between the Generals concerned.

M. CLEMENCEAU thought that as the American Government had accepted General Foch's jurisdiction over the American troops in France there was no reason why the Italian Government should not equally fall in line.

SIGNOR ORLANDO pointed out that the above agreement as it stood applied to the three Armies in France. If at any time there were three Allied Armies in Italy which had to meet a big enemy



offensive, then he thought that his Government would accept the principle of a supreme commander.

GENERAL FOCH said that Signor Orlando had stated that if at any time the Allied Armies were fighting side by side in Italy, then there should be a Commander-in-Chief in supreme command. But even if that were not the case, in his view it was most important that Italy should accept and adopt the same system of co-ordination as the other Allies had in France. It was greatly to the interest of General Diaz to know what was the situation at any time in France, and what were the plans of the Allied Commanders there; similarly, the officer in supreme command in France must know exactly what the situation was in Italy so that he could make his plans accordingly. The only thing to his mind was to apply the system of co-ordination to Italy. This did not at all mean the application of the supreme command to Italy, but only a complete co-ordination of system.

SIGNOR ORLANDO stated that he had tried on the previous day to express his views clearly by saying that the Beauvais Agreement could be considered from two angles of vision:—

1. It established the principle of an effective command of the Allied troops in the same theatre of war. This did not at present apply outside France, but he would accept the principle when it was thought necessary to apply it to Italy.

2. The application of the principle of co-ordination to all the Allied Armies. This also he was prepared to accept, but he wished to point out that so far he was only a third party to the bargain and not one of the contracting parties in respect of the Beauvais Agreement.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE said that he drew a distinction between (a) co-ordination, (b) the functions of General Foch as supreme commander. The agreement decided upon at Beauvais marked a notable advance upon that which had been accepted at Doullens. General Foch as Generalissimo had functions in France which did not apply to the Italian Army. General Foch actually gave orders as to the disposition of the troops in France. He thought that they should invite Signor Orlando not to accept the Beauvais Agreement as extended to cover Italy, but the Doullens Agreement which merely co-ordinated the combined efforts of the Allies from the Channel to the Adriatic.

M. CLEMENCEAU said they were all agreed about General Foch's powers in France, which covered the French, British and American troops there.

GENERAL FOCH pointed out that the Doullens Agreement was a dead letter and had been superseded by the Beauvais Convention. He deprecated the resuscitation of a buried agreement.

MR. LLOYD GEORGE thought that the Council at present was arguing about two different matters. He thought that Signor Orlando would certainly agree to General Foch commanding such Italian troops as might be in or be sent to France, but he himself would go further, and he would ask Signor Orlando to accept the principle of co-ordination under General Foch extended to the shores of the Adriatic.

M. CLEMENCEAU said that that was all he himself desired.

GENERAL FOCH said that the Doullens Agreement was to co-ordinate the actions on the Western Front. The Beauvais Agreement, however, went further.

SIGNOR ORLANDO said that the Beauvais Agreement was dual in character; it covered both co-ordination and the principle of supreme command. He himself accepted the principle of co-ordination.

## CHAPTER LXXX

### THE MAURICE DEBATE

AFTER the second German offensive of 1918 had been successfully fought to a standstill a controversy arose as to the conditions that led to the March defeat. This controversy threatened the life of the Government and in the sequel had a disruptive effect upon the fortunes of the Liberal Party.

Those who were anxious to escape from their responsibility for the heavy defeat which our Army had sustained in the first spring offensive attributed it entirely to the neglect of the Government to provide the necessary quota to make up the heavy losses sustained in the autumn by our fighting forces in Flanders. It was represented that the British Army had on March 21st been overwhelmed by an enemy which considerably outnumbered them and that there were no reserves available to support our hard-pressed Army. As Haig put it when he met Gough after the defeat, "We cannot fight without men." Most fantastic figures were in circulation as to the wretched remnant of troops with which Haig had been expected to fight the greatest battle of the War against the whole might of an immense German Army. A conspicuous example of this pernicious gossip is a statement made at this time by Mr. Arnold Bennett—which constitutes one of his most imaginative "Old Wives' Tales"—that the British infantry had been reduced to 250,000 men!

The militarist Press took up the cue. There was a propagandist campaign organised in the Press, in social circles, in the clubs and in the Lobbies of the House, and it ultimately culminated in the cabal which, after working assiduously but in vain to overthrow the Government for attempting to organise a General Reserve behind our threatened Army, thought that, after repeated failures, their opportunity had at last arrived. Since the War the apologists of G.H.Q. have repeated the censure without giving to it any statistical support. I feel therefore that it is incumbent on me to dispose finally of this calumny by giving the official figures supplied to the Government by the War Office. I shall quote no figures except those officially supplied by the appropriate military authorities at the time. My principal witness will be Sir Frederick Maurice, the fizzling cracker that was chosen to blow up the Government.

I have already stated very fully the difficulties experienced by the



Government in raising fresh recruits for the fighting forces. It was the common experience of every belligerent country in the fifth year of the War. In each and all of those countries the military Staffs were exerting the whole of their influence to extract the last available men for the shambles. In every country they criticised and bullied their Governments for keeping fit men at home to do essential work instead of sending them to the Army. In Germany Ludendorff complained that there were not munitions for the front and that the enemy were much better supplied. In the same document he grumbled that there were too many fit men in the workshops and that they ought to be pulled out and sent to the army. These contradictory attacks on politicians were only the common form of insensate nagging by those who have failed to make the best use of the material placed at their disposal. They ascribe their own shortcomings to defects in quality or quantity of the means with which they have been so lavishly equipped. What were the charges brought against the Government by some of our armchair soldiers?

1. That we ought to have combed out more closely the essential industries of the country to make up for the abnormal and underestimated losses of Passchendaele.

2. That we had deliberately and knowingly left our Army to face vastly superior numbers of Germans without taking the necessary measures to reinforce them, because we had not the courage to face the labour clamour that might ensue.

3. That we wasted a needlessly large number of troops on "side-shows" which were not in the least helpful to the winning of the War.

As to the first charge, I have dealt with it fully in my chapter on man-power. I claim that there I have shown that from the point of view of the effective prosecution of the War, the Government made a much more effective use of the man-power of the nation than the Generals made of the fine manhood placed at their disposal. We did our best to avoid wasting this valuable asset of the nation. Will anyone who has fairly read the grim story of our military futilities make the same claim for the Allied Army leaders—in Russia, France or Britain?

As to the second charge, that the Government, either through carelessness or cowardice had allowed our troops on the Western Front to be so outnumbered that they had no chance to put up a successful fight against the German onset, I will now give the actual figures supplied to me at the time by the very men at the War Office who, when they were disgruntled by supersession, became our principal critics. Sir Frederick Maurice, who subsequently instigated the Parliamentary onslaught on the Government, was up to the end of April on the Staff at the War Office as Director of Military Operations, and

it was he who kept the Cabinet informed from time to time as to the relative strength of the German and Allied forces on the Western Front. On the 13th March—a week before the great battle—he imparted to the Cabinet the information that “the enemy on that front had an approximate rifle strength of 1,370,000 men with 15,700 guns while the total Allied rifle strength on the Western Front numbered 1,500,000 infantry and 16,600 guns. The relative strength of a British division was slightly larger than that of a German division.” This gave us a superiority of 130,000 men in infantry alone. If the numbers of men employed in the artillery, in tanks and in aeroplanes are added, the superiority was then considerably greater. On the 23rd March, the third day of the great battle, we were given fresh figures. War Office statistics were always like the desert sands. Any change in the wind either converted humps into hollows or hollows into humps—according to the direction of the wind. Here they are as they were given to the Cabinet by Sir Frederick Maurice, this time corroborated by a less mercurial arithmetician, General Macdonogh, the Director of Military Intelligence: German rifle strength 1,402,800; Allies 1,418,000: a superiority still which was the equivalent of two German divisions. This is without reckoning our supremacy in the air, and in guns, ammunition, machine-guns, tanks and transport, all involving a highly effective addition to our combatant strength in men.

I have already quoted the War Office figure as to guns. On the 20th March they furnished us with a comparison of Allied and enemy strength in other arms.

*Machine-guns.*

Allies .....	100,000
Enemy .....	64,000

*Cavalry.*

Allies .....	84,000
Enemy .....	38,000

In the battle dismounted cavalry formed a valuable reserve. Without their horses the cavalry proved to be an efficient fighting force. In tanks we had an overwhelming advantage. In at least one great battle this superiority gave us the victory. On April 10th, after the Battle of Amiens had been fought to a standstill and the British Army were facing the second day of a second battle on the Western Front, Sir Frederick Maurice gave to the Cabinet what he called “some particulars as to the relative strengths of the Allied and enemy divisions at the present time on the Western Front.” He assumed that the Portuguese divisions were “knocked out.” They would therefore not be in the computation. The enemy infantry was given as 1,370,000; the battle and the loss of the Portuguese had reduced

the Allied rifle strength to 1,450,000 men. Six or seven German divisions had been brought from Russia since the first battle began. Maurice reported these as compensating for German losses in the attack. He put these losses at 200,000. Seven full German divisions would not make 60,000 men—barely 50,000 in rifle strength. In all these estimates there is a straining to exaggerate enemy strength and to minimise our own. On the other hand, full allowance is made for our own losses and there is the choice of rifles as the basis of comparison, which gives no fair idea of our real superiority in combatant power. Nevertheless, after a disastrous battle in which Haig complained that he could not fight without men, the Allies on the Western Front had still an infantry superiority of 80,000. Had the superiority of men employed in artillery, tanks, aircraft and cavalry been included, it would have been at least 150,000. And yet our Commander-in-Chief could not hold entrenchments dug and wired against an attack from inferior numbers of troops which he had described as being of poor quality. Why? Because he had not enough men, forsooth! It is an insult to the British and French soldiers who fought with such incredible valour. If the Allied superiority in men and mechanical power was not organised in such a way as to be utilised to the best advantage on the day of the battle, whose fault was that?

These figures were volunteered to the Cabinet by Sir Frederick Maurice on April 10th. We had no further reports which would disturb the confidence created by General Maurice's careful and encouraging analyses of the intelligence received from G.H.Q. as to the statistical position. On April 18th the C.I.G.S., who said he had "only just returned from France," reported that the British and French had three more divisions in reserve than the Germans. This did not include the Americans who had two or three complete and trained divisions in reserve. Alas! all of a sudden our superiority disappeared in a week-end! I woke up on Monday, the 22nd of April, to read in the Weekly Summary prepared by the General Staff that an Allied superiority of 86,000 rifles had been converted into a German superiority of 330,000! Had some catastrophe befallen the Allies unawares, like the pestilence that destroyed Sennacherib's Army in a single night? Our reports from France showed that the Germans were suffering much heavier losses than the Allies. The German official figures when they reached us later confirmed our estimates. But the disaster that tore such a yawning chasm in the Allied battalions occurred not on the blood-stained fields of France or Flanders but in a carpeted chamber of the War Office. The devastation of our ranks was not wrought by German artillery but by a British fountain pen. What had occurred to precipitate such a calamity? Sir Henry Wilson was desirous of securing a D.M.O. in whom he had greater confidence than he had in the then occupant



of that office—so he substituted General P. de B. Radcliffe for General Sir Frederick Maurice. I do not wish to discuss the comparative merits of these two officers. I am only concerned to point out the shattering effect of the change upon our poor harassed infantry in France and our humbugged public at home. The Germans had an unexpected reinforcement of 200,000 bayonets, and 120,000 of our riflemen dissolved in the mist. And the American divisions had been wiped out altogether or relegated to a footnote as unconsidered trifles. What unheard-of disaster! I was naturally staggered at this inexplicable transformation. I realised that the battle had been transferred to the Home Front. I therefore dictated the following Memorandum for the General Staff in order to obtain from them some explanation of this catastrophic change in our military position.

“ SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR.

I am entirely at a loss to understand the figures of Allied and enemy rifle strength printed in last week's summary of the military situation. Before I made my statement on the introduction of the Man-power Bill in the House of Commons I asked the Staff to supply me with information as to the strength of the opposing forces on the Western Front at the commencement of the battle. Those figures showed a slight Allied superiority in infantry, a three and a half to one superiority in cavalry, a considerable superiority in artillery, a very considerable superiority in machine-guns and also a decided superiority in aircraft. No figures were however supplied of the numbers of aeroplanes on either side. Now I am told that after four weeks of the fighting, the enemy rifle strength is greater by 333,000 than that of the Allies. What possible explanation can there be of this? The attempted explanation is surely an inadequate one. What is it? ‘Since then the situation has been materially altered by the reduction of six British divisions, the disappearance for fighting purposes of the Portuguese contingent and the arrival of 18 more German divisions from Russia, Italy and the Balkans.’

1. This is the first I have heard of 18 divisions having arrived from the East and the Balkans since the battle began, for the figures supplied me by the Staff were figures of the forces on 21st March. However, even assuming there were 18, the net addition to the German strength does not even approximate 333,000 rifles.

The disappearance of the eight Allied divisions at the outside represents a loss of between 70,000 and 80,000. The addition of the 18 German would represent another 135,000. Add this figure to the 80,000 minus on the Allied side; the total is 215,000.

But the writer of this paragraph has given no credit for the divisions that have arrived in France on the Allied side since 21st

March. There have been two British and four French. These represent at least 50,000 rifles. Deduct that figure from the 215,000. That leaves 165,000, which is exactly half the superiority claimed for the Germans at the present date. Unless therefore the figures supplied to me by the Staff a fortnight ago were deplorably misleading, this paper ought instantly to be revised and the Ministers amongst whom it is circulated warned of the serious error for which it is responsible. If on the other hand I was misled a fortnight ago and the House of Commons and the country through me, then it is time that the Department responsible for information should be thoroughly overhauled.

2. But my criticism of the figures in the summary of military information does not end here. Machine-gunners have been cut out as if they were no addition to the rifle strength of the forces. Why is that? Is it because the Allies happen to have a very considerable superiority in machine-guns and it does not suit the writer of this paper to insert any figure which minimises the German superiority? The same observation applies to this omission to include the cavalry. Many French, and I believe British, cavalry divisions have been added to the rifle strength of the Allied Armies, and are now fighting in the line as infantry. Our superiority in cavalry is between 40,000 and 50,000. Why should that be left out?

How does he make out that 205 enemy divisions represent 1,617,000 rifle strength? I understand that the enemy have nine battalions in each division and that each battalion is 750 strong. That comes to less than 1,400,000 rifle strength. Something was said about a week ago about the battalion strength of the enemy being increased to 850 before the battle. If that were done it must have been either by the addition of machine-gunners or by taking 180,000 men out of the depots behind the line. Should it be the former then machine-gunners ought to be added to the calculation of the British and French rifle strength. Should it be the latter, then 180,000 ought to be deducted out of the 400,000 reserves which the Germans are supposed to have had ready for drafts at the commencement of the battle. If the latter should turn out to be the case, then taking the German casualties at 300,000, even assuming the whole of their 400,000 drafts were infantry men—which is a big assumption—the Germans must already be 80,000 short in the rifle strength of their divisions.

From any point of view this document is extraordinarily slipshod, and I suggest that a thorough investigation be made as to how it came to be prepared and who is responsible for editing and issuing it.

D. LL. G.

That day I brought the amazing production of the War Office Staff before the Cabinet and demanded an explanation from the C.I.G.S. Neither Maurice, the late D.M.O., nor Radcliffe, his successor, was present. Sir Henry Wilson did not seem to have seen the report and was quite unable to explain the discrepancy between the figures submitted by Maurice to the Cabinet a few days since and those which appeared in the Weekly Survey. He disclaimed all responsibility for the revised figures, but promised to institute inquiries and report later on. I found that the Director of Military Intelligence to whom all reports of enemy strength were brought, and by whom they were carefully sifted, knew nothing of this fresh estimate. The new D.M.O. was not in charge at the time it was prepared. At that time Maurice was responsible. It was said of Wellington that his long nose was worth so many thousands to the British Army. Of Sir Frederick Maurice it could be said that when his nose was put out of joint it was worth 400,000 bayonets to the enemy.

It was understood that Maurice was hopeful of receiving either a Command or a Staff appointment in France, but Haig was not eager to be so patently associated with a political intrigue in England, especially over a personal quarrel which did not concern him. The fate of Robertson had not moved him. Why should he worry over a much smaller man? So Maurice did not go to France. He spent his unsought vacation in caballing against the Government with its enemies in Parliament and in the Press. His judgment was never specially sound and now that he was deprived of his responsible post on the Staff it became for the time being completely unhinged. There is no other charitable explanation for his conduct. He may have taken counsel with friends: if so, those may have been somebody's friends, but they certainly were not his. He wrote to the papers for publication a letter which condemned as inaccurate a statement made in the House of Commons on military matters by two members of the Government—Mr. Bonar Law and myself. He was still in the service as an officer. Such knowledge as he possessed on these questions must have been acquired as a member of the Staff. In fact he claimed that his knowledge on one point arose from his being present at a War Council. He did not seek permission to reveal it. Had he been an officer in the British Expeditionary Force and written a letter challenging the accuracy of an official *communiqué* which he alleged misrepresented the truth about a battle in which he had taken part, he would have been promptly courtmartialled. That his allegations were false, of course aggravated the offence. The terms of Sir Frederick Maurice's letter to the Press were as follows:—

“ To the Editor of —

Sir,—My attention has been called to answers given in the House of Commons on 23rd April by Mr. Bonar Law, to question



put by Mr. G. Lambert, Colonel Burn and Mr. Pringle as to the extension of the British Front in France (Hansard, Vol. 105, No. 34, p. 815). These answers contain certain misstatements which in sum give a totally misleading impression of what occurred. This is not the place to enter into a discussion as to all the facts, but Hansard's report of the incident concludes—

Mr. Pringle: Was this matter entered into at the Versailles War Council at any time?

Mr. Bonar Law: This particular matter was not dealt with at all by the Versailles War Council.

I was at Versailles when the question was decided by the Supreme War Council to whom it had been referred.

This is the latest of a series of misstatements which have been made recently in the House of Commons by the present Government.

On 9th April the Prime Minister said:—

'What was the position at the beginning of the battle? Notwithstanding the heavy casualties in 1917 the Army in France was considerably stronger on the 1st January, 1918, than on the 1st January, 1917.' (Hansard, Vol. 104, No. 24, p. 1328.)

That statement implies that Sir Douglas Haig's fighting strength on the eve of the great battle which began on 21st March had not been diminished.

That is not correct.

Again, in the same speech the Prime Minister said: 'In Mesopotamia there is only one white division at all and in Egypt and in Palestine there are only three white divisions; the rest are either Indians or mixed with a very small proportion of British troops in those divisions—I am referring to the infantry divisions.' (*ibid.*, p. 1327.)

That is not correct.

Now, Sir, this letter is not the result of a military conspiracy. It has been seen by no soldier. I am by descent and conviction as sincere a democrat as the Prime Minister, and the last thing I want is to see the Government of our country in the hands of soldiers.

My reasons for taking the very grave step of writing this letter are that the statements quoted above are known to a large number of soldiers to be incorrect, and this knowledge is breeding such distrust of the Government as can only end in impairing the splendid morale of our troops at a time when everything possible should be done to raise it.

I have therefore decided, fully realising, the consequences to myself, that my duty as a citizen must override my duty as a

soldier, and I ask you to publish this letter, in the hope that Parliament may see fit to order an investigation into the statements I have made.

I am,

Yours faithfully,

F. MAURICE, Major-General.

20, Kensington Park Gardens,  
6th May."

I must enter into this transaction in some detail not only because it represented the last of a series of efforts made by the opposition and their military confederates to embarrass and overthrow the Government at a critical moment when we needed all our faculties of nerve and mind to deal with a grave emergency, but because it played a dominant part in the General Election at the end of the year and had a great deal to do with the rout which befell Mr. Asquith's followers at the 1918 Election. Neither Bonar Law nor I alluded to the incident during the whole contest, but the electorate had not forgotten nor did they forgive those who engineered or took part in this conspiracy at such an anxious stage in the War, and the Mauriceites were annihilated at the polls.

It soon became evident that Sir Frederick Maurice was the tool of astuter men who used him for their own personal and partisan purposes. Before the letter ever appeared, questions were put in the House by bitter opponents of the Government based on information which had obviously come from military sources. When the Maurice letter first appeared, the Opposition Press hailed it as a justification for turning out the Government. The *Westminster Gazette* (since defunct), a paper inspired by Mr. M'Kenna, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, promptly wrote, "There must be a drastic change in all this, and if it involves a change of Government that must come too." The Government had lost the confidence of the country, continued the article. It announced the first move of the Opposition—a Parliamentary Committee to institute a searching inquiry into General Maurice's allegations. The *Times* demanded that the inquiry should extend beyond those questions, and that it should include such questions as man-power—whether the Army had made a proper use of the men the country had already provided—also the Versailles Council and finally Unity of Command. I felt that such an inquiry conducted in the middle of a great battle would be highly dangerous. It would paralyse all war direction, for it would distract the attention of Ministers and of the Staff from urgent affairs; it would divide the nation, and such divisions would no doubt extend to the Army. I was therefore in favour of taking the Opposition challenge on the floor of the House of Commons at the earliest opportunity and of having done with it one way or the other. Mr. Bonar

Law, however, felt that his personal honour was impugned, and he insisted on a tribunal of two judges to investigate the charges. Mr. Asquith demanded a Select Committee. Mr. Bonar Law offered a judicial Tribunal of Judges. This proposal was rejected by the Opposition. Upon which Mr. Asquith gave notice that he would move for the appointment of a Select Committee.

The motion for the Debate tabled by Mr. Asquith demanded:—

“That a Select Committee of this House be appointed to inquire into the allegations of incorrectness in certain Statements of Ministers of the Crown to this House, contained in a letter of Major-General Maurice, late Director of Military Operations, published in the Press on the 7th day of May.”

This motion was acclaimed by the enemies of the Government as a direct challenge to its authority, and the Opposition Press canvassed in headlines the chances of the Administration falling and the possibility of forming an alternative Ministry. The Government, they argued, had accepted the principle of an inquiry by proposing a Judicial Tribunal. But the only verdict the Opposition would accept would be one by a Select Committee. The nature of the evidence to be examined was such that it could not be laid before a Select Committee. Therefore the Government must resign!

On the following day, May 9th, 1918, the Maurice Debate took place in the House of Commons. In proposing his motion, Mr. Asquith somewhat surprisingly disclaimed any intention of attacking the Administration. “Nor again,” he declared, “is the Motion which I am about to make, either in intention or effect, as I have seen it rather absurdly described, a Vote of Censure upon the Government.” Seeing that the newspapers supporting him had for the past two days been making it abundantly clear that the Government could not possibly accept the motion and retain office, this disclaimer deceived no one. Mr. Asquith urged the merits of a Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry, and the demerits of any other kind of inquiry, and dramatically asked, “What is the alternative?”

“Get on with the War!” suggested Mr. Stanton, a Miners’ Member; a remark which Mr. Asquith characterised as “very irrelevant.” The interjection was, however, received with such a cheer as I have rarely heard in the House.

In my reply, I began by pointing out the inconsistency which had marked General Maurice’s conduct.

“A General, a distinguished General, who, for good or bad reasons, has ceased to hold an office which he has occupied for two years, challenges, after he has left office, statements made by two Ministers during the time he was in that office. During the time



he was in such office he never challenged those statements, when he not only had access to official information, but when he had access to the Ministers themselves."

General Maurice had been in daily contact with me. On the days following the speech he now challenged, he had been present at the War Cabinet. Neither at those meetings nor privately had he protested, either to me as Premier or to his own Chiefs, the Secretary of State for War or the C.I.G.S., about a matter which he now felt to be so vital as to warrant him in breaking King's Regulations and setting an example of indiscipline to the whole Army.

I then dealt with the issue of a Select Committee, proposed by Mr. Asquith. I pointed out that while the issue was purely one of fact, which two impartial judges could swiftly settle, it involved reference to a mass of confidential information, the official military secrets of ourselves and our Allies. It would be highly undesirable to have this exposed to a Committee of the House, particularly to one on which Party passions were certain to be running high. On the other hand, it had become clear since Tuesday that the judicial panel proposed by the Government was not acceptable to the Opposition. The hostile Press "which is egging on my right hon. friend, prodding him, and suggesting that he ought to do this and the other to embarrass the Government," had made it perfectly clear that no statement, no decision of any secret tribunal, would ever be accepted.

I had therefore abandoned the idea of arranging for an inquiry, and I proceeded instead to give to the House the essential facts in rebuttal of General Maurice's charges. In regard to the question of relative strength of the British Army on January 1st, 1917, and January 1st, 1918, I showed that the figures on which was based the reply to a question on this point on April 18th were obtained from a note supplied by General Maurice's own Department.

As a matter of fact—although I could not quote these figures to the House, as it would have involved publishing a secret War Office return—the official war figures, supplied by the D.M.O.'s own Department, on which my original assertion had been based, showed that the total ration strength of the B.E.F. in France on January 1st, 1917, was 1,594,000; and that on January 1st, 1918, it was 1,970,000. These figures are inclusive of certain non-military labour units—Chinese and Indian, etc. If these are omitted, the strength of the troops themselves, combatant and non-combatant, shown in the published "Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire," is found to be:—

1st January, 1917	...	...	...	1,591,745
1st March, 1917	...	...	...	1,802,048
1st January, 1918	...	...	...	1,828,616
1st March, 1918	...	...	...	1,886,073

The figures given me by General Maurice's Department on April 18th, showing combatant strength only in the B.E.F., France, were: —

January, 1917	...	...	...	1,253,000
January, 1918	...	...	...	1,298,000

I quoted to the House the conclusion of the covering Note from General Sir Frederick Maurice's Department which ran: —

"From the statement included, it will be seen that the combatant strength of the British Army was greater on the 1st January, 1918, than on the 1st January, 1917."

On this I remarked: —

"This comes from General Maurice's own Department, nine days after I made that statement! I am not depending on the fact that all these men who were ruled out as 'non-combatants' are an essential part of the strength of the British Army in France. I have this statement, that, as regards those who were technically treated as combatants, we were better off on the 1st January, 1918, than on the 1st January, 1917. As a matter of fact, there was an increase as between the 1st January and March, 1918, but it just happened that I thought I would take the first month of the year."

I further pointed out that as regards our strength relative to the enemy in March, 1918, statements had been made by General Maurice himself on March 27th, and April 3rd, which had appeared in the American Press, declaring that: —

"on the whole front, the opposing forces at the beginning of the battle were approximately equal, and therefore the readjustment of the balance on the battlefield is only a matter of time."

If there were in fact anything inaccurate in the statement made by me, which General Maurice had challenged, it was based on information and figures supplied by the General's own Department, so that Maurice would himself have been responsible for misleading the Premier and through him the public.

Passing to the question of the number of British divisions in the East, I said there was no doubt as to there being only one in Mesopotamia. As for the number in Egypt and Palestine, I had been informed in the Cabinet by the C.I.G.S., in Maurice's presence, that there were only three, which was at that time the official position, though I had since learnt that the reconstitution of the other divisions by the substitution of Indian for British troops had not then been fully completed. If there had been delay in substituting Indian for white troops the military authorities were responsible. The minute of the meeting, recording the C.I.G.S.'s statement, had

been submitted to Maurice, who suggested no correction. It was grotesque to charge me with attempting to mislead the public when I quoted an official statement supplied to me by the Department for which the General who was now impugning my accuracy was directly responsible.

As regards the extension of the British Front, I pointed out first that General Maurice was not, as he had alleged, himself present in the Council Chamber at Versailles when discussion turned on this issue, and that the implication deliberately given in his letter that he was thus present was false. Secondly, I made it clear that the extension of the British Front had been agreed between Pétain and Haig and according to Haig's own statement to the Council had already been carried out. The extension discussed at the Council was a further one, which never came into effect. And in the third place I dealt with the suggestion that the actual extension was one forced on Robertson and Haig against their judgment by the War Cabinet. Carefully choosing my phrases in order not to give offence to our Ally, I told the House how the French had insisted, as a military necessity, on our taking over more of the line; how Robertson had agreed to it, subject to its being left to Haig, in discussion with Pétain, to decide how much he felt himself capable of taking over; and how, far from the decision being made by the War Cabinet and forced on an unwilling military Command, it had proceeded from the urgent demand of the French military authorities, agreed to by our own, and carried out by the Commanders-in-Chief in joint consultation. In this connection I read to the House a Memorandum of October 18th, 1917, by General Sir William Robertson, confirming the fact that no decision had been taken by the political leaders behind Sir Douglas Haig's back. The Memorandum was as follows:—

“At the recent Boulogne Conference between the Prime Minister, M. Painlevé, General Foch and myself, the question of extending our front was raised by the French representatives. The reply was given that, while in principle we were of course ready to do whatever could be done, the matter was one which could not be discussed in the absence of Sir Douglas Haig, or during the continuance of the present operations, and that due regard must also be had to the plan of operations for next year. It was suggested that it would be best for the Field-Marshal to come to an arrangement with General Pétain when this could be done. So far as I am aware, no further formal discussion has taken place, and the matter therefore cannot be regarded as ‘decided.’ Further, I feel sure that the War Cabinet would not think of deciding such an important question, without first obtaining Sir Douglas Haig's views. I am replying to him in the above sense.”



I also quoted from the War Cabinet Minutes of October 24th, 1917, to show that the decision they then took with regard to the extension of the front was to approve the policy suggested to them in this matter by Sir William Robertson. I sketched the further history of the matter, which confirmed the fact that while Sir Douglas Haig had enjoyed the full approval and authority of the War Cabinet in the steps he had taken to extend his line, the measure had been the result, not of Cabinet dictation, but of the pressure of the French Government and military authorities—pressure which he could not well resist.

The real moral of the discussion about extension of the British front was the necessity for unity of command.

“That question of the extension of the line would never have arisen if we had had that unity. Instead of one Army and one Commander responsible for one part of the line and another Army and another Commander responsible for another part of the line, one united Army—one united Command—responsible for the whole and for every part was the only method of safety. I am glad we have got that at last. It was not so much a question of the length of the line held by one force, and the length of the line held by another. It was a question of the reserves which were massed behind. If we put two or three more divisions into the line, there were two or three fewer divisions which we could put into the reserves, but the French had two or three more divisions which they could put into the reserves.”

I expressed regret that Mr. Asquith should have failed to deprecate General Maurice's grave breach of discipline, which set a most subversive example to the Army at large. I concluded by appealing for national unity in face of the very serious situation with which the nation was confronted. This kind of controversy wasted time and energy which the Government should be using to prepare for a fresh German onslaught.

“I really implore, for our common country, the fate of which is in the balance now and in the next few weeks, that there should be an end of this sniping.”

Sir Edward Carson appealed to Mr. Asquith to withdraw his motion, but in vain. No doubt he had given his followers pledges to take it to a division, and could not draw back. It was defeated by 293 votes to 106. The Opposition Press could not conceal the fact next day that they had been defeated, not only by votes, but by the circumstances that on examination they had been shown to have no case.

General Maurice was dealt with by the military authorities, who notwithstanding placed him on retired pay.

## CHAPTER LXXXI

### THE AMERICAN ARMIES IN FRANCE

ON April 2nd, 1917, President Wilson declared that a state of war existed between America and Germany. I have already drawn attention to the fact that at the outset America was entirely unprepared for carrying on active military operations on an adequate scale. Wilson had consistently discouraged every appeal made to him in America to strengthen the forces of the republic in order to deal with the menacing contingencies in which the States might become involved. Even after the declaration, the preparations for a vigorous prosecution tarried and loitered in a manner which I find it difficult to explain when one looks at the dynamic energy and resourcefulness of this wonderful people. For almost a year after war had been declared, the contribution of the mighty republic to the struggle in France was on a comparatively insignificant scale. It was very much less than that which the far smaller British nation had succeeded in making in a similar period.

It will be understood that I am here speaking chiefly of the military effort of the United States. Her financial and economic assistance was from the outset invaluable, and had been developed on a considerable scale long before any large number of her troops were ready to take their place in the battle line. And her naval assistance became highly serviceable in helping us to counter the submarine menace. We were short of torpedo-craft for our convoys. Here the assistance of the American Fleet was eminently useful.

At the end of September, 1917, when America had been approximately six months at war, the total strength of the American Expeditionary Force in France was 61,531, and none of her divisions had as yet been placed in the line. America and Britain were alike in one respect. They had not trained their young manhood by conscript laws to the use of arms. They both relied on small professional armies and citizen organisations. But at the end of six months the British Expeditionary Force on the Western Front numbered 354,750. The 1st American Division was put into a quiet sector of the French Front on October 21st, 1917—nearly seven months after the severance of diplomatic relations with Germany. No other American division went into the line until 11 months had elapsed since the entry of America into the War. A considerable period of

training was needed to prepare recruits for the highly scientific methods of warfare which had been developed during the past three and a half years, involving the close co-operation of infantry with machine-guns, trench mortars, artillery barrages, tanks, etc.: the organisation of trench warfare, gas drill, and all the complexities of munitionment in this growingly elaborate and mechanised struggle. The tide of American forces in France, which was ultimately to swell to so large a flood, mounted only in a dribbling fashion during those early months. By the end of October it was 87,000; by the end of November, 126,000; and at the beginning of 1918, 175,000. That was nine months after the entry of America into the War. At that stage in our own war effort we had already thrown 659,104 into the various war theatres.

Yet this flow, so tardy for the time being, was watched with concentrated interest by friend and foe alike, and became the dominating strategical factor in the calculations of both sides. Hindenburg and Ludendorff on the one side, and Foch and Pétain on the other, framed their plans for 1918 with their eyes fixed on this gulf-stream of young manhood that was flowing from the shores of America towards Europe. It is clear, from a study of the accounts given of the struggle on the German side, that the prospect of that swelling flow of American troops was the consideration which finally determined the German High Command to risk all on a desperate thrust in March, 1918, in an effort to gain a decision before the arrival of the full flood of American fighting men in the battle area. Equally the prospect of the American reinforcement coming to their aid enabled the French, after the failure of the Nivelle offensive and the outbreak of mutiny in their ranks in the summer of 1917, to avert panic and resign themselves without undue despondency to standing quietly on the defensive for the remainder of the year and waiting until in the course of 1918 the American advent should turn the tide in their favour. In all the conferences and strategical discussions of the Allies during the autumn and winter of 1917, this prospective asset figures prominently. Before ever the Americans had fired a shot in battle, their coming turned the scale of confidence and hope in favour of the Allies.

In the autumn of 1917, however, this reinforcement was arriving with what seemed to be disconcerting and perplexing slowness. Both the French and ourselves were apprehensive lest, if it were not speeded up, it should arrive too late to save the Allied Front from collapse in face of a formidable German attack. The reservoir of French man-power had almost run dry and ours was approaching exhaustion; and now that Russia was falling out, we knew only too well that the enemy would be able to bring masses of additional troops to the West, and that with this increased striking force he might achieve some decisive success before the Americans could turn



the scale. Thus it became a matter of vital moment to press for a speeding-up in the transit of the American forces, and to co-operate with the United States as effectively as possible to this end.

As has been related elsewhere, one of the first steps taken by Britain and France after the entry of America into the War had been to send Missions to the States to ensure co-operation and good understanding with their new associate in the conflict. But before long it was evident that if America was to take her proper place in the councils of the Allies, and render the help of which she was capable, efforts would have to be made to bring prominent Americans into closer contact with the urgent day-to-day problems which the War brought forth.

I had a feeling that the remoteness of America in miles and still more in atmosphere from the scene of the conflict had much to do with the leisurely way in which her preparations for taking part in the actual fighting were being conducted. The enemy was on the soil of France and within a score of leagues of its capital. German ships occasionally bombarded our coast towns and German Zeppelins and aeroplanes raided our capital and killed hundreds of our women and children. City and village were everywhere darkened at night, so as to offer no guidance to the raiders as to where they could drop their shattering bombs with the deadliest effect. All our greatest town and country houses had been converted into hospitals which were crowded with the wounded from the ghastly battlefields of the Continent. And the prevalence of black in the costumes of our women testified to the numbers who were grieving over the most irreparable havoc of war. There was no need for speeches or exhortations in the Press to remind the nation that it was engaged in mortal grip with the most formidable enemy it had ever challenged. And yet even in Britain there were moments of slackness which impeded critical preparations. Men have been known to sleep amidst the greatest perils through sheer nervous exhaustion. And when our jeopardy was greatest we had to take special measures by visits from the King, by propaganda, and otherwise to stimulate workers of every grade to greater energy. We could, therefore, well understand why in a country which had none of these grim reminders that it was at war there was not the same constant urge to hurry and hustle. But I thought that, since we could not anchor the States within sound of the struggle, we might accomplish something if we could induce a few of their leading citizens to come over and see for themselves how pressing was the need.

I asked Lord Reading and Sir William Wiseman to propose to Colonel House that a United States Mission should be sent to Europe, composed of the heads of the more important departments concerned with the war effort, to study the problems at close range. Wiseman did so in a letter containing the following passage:—

"I believe the greatest asset Germany has to-day is the 3,000 miles that separates London from Washington, and the most urgent problem we have to solve is how our two Governments, set at opposite ends of the world, can effect the close co-operation which is undoubtedly necessary if the War is to be quickly and successfully ended. Would the President consider the advisability of sending plenipotentiary envoys to London and Paris, with the object of taking part in the next great Allied Council, bringing their fresh minds to bear on our problems, discussing and giving their judgment on some of the questions I have raised, and also to arrange—if that be possible—for some machinery to bridge over the distance between Washington and the theatre of war?"

This letter was dated September 26th, 1917. Colonel House, who knew European War conditions better than most of his countrymen, not excluding the President, acted promptly, and early in October, President Wilson made up his mind that such a Mission was necessary, and decided to send one with Colonel House at its head.

On learning this, the Foreign Secretary, on behalf and at the request of the Cabinet, sent on October 14th, 1917, to Colonel House, cable saying:—

"I am authorised by French and British Cabinets to extend to you a most cordial invitation to take part in conversations and conferences on all questions of war and peace. It is with the greatest gratification that they have learnt of the probability that this invitation may prove acceptable. I cannot speak officially of Italians and Russians, but you may safely assume that they share our interests. . . ."

President Wilson was saturated with the American suspicion and distrust of Europe, which would have been difficult to explain in a people whose ancestry was European, had it not been for the fact that the emigrants had fled from the privations and oppressions of Europe to seek a land whose economic opportunities were ampler and whose laws gave greater promise of freedom and equality. The President decided that this was to be a visiting, not a permanent Mission. The Mission was to be exploratory with a view to establishing liaison and to clear up outstanding issues. Apart from Colonel House, its principal members were:—

Rear-Admiral W. S. Benson, Chief of Naval Operations.  
General Tasker H. Bliss, Chief of Staff of the Army.  
Oscar T. Crosby, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury.  
Paul Cravath, Legal Adviser to the Treasury.  
Vance C. McCormick, Chairman of the War Trade Board.

Bainbridge Colby, representing the United States Shipping Board.

Dr. Alonzo R. Taylor, representing the United States Food Controller.

Thomas Nelson Perkins, Legal Adviser to the War Industries Board.

The Secretary to the Mission was Gordon Auchincloss, Assistant Counsellor of the State Department.

The Mission left the States on October 29th, and arrived at Plymouth on November 7th, 1917. With their coming, the participation of the United States in the World War took on a new meaning and value. The representatives of economic and commercial interests were able, with their opposite numbers of France and Britain, to clear up difficult outstanding issues which had hitherto delayed progress. And General Bliss passed to the Supreme War Council at Versailles, which was set up shortly after his arrival here, as the American member of the body of Permanent Military Representatives. It was a happy choice, fortunate for America and specially fortunate for the cause of the Allies as a whole. He was level-headed, and endowed with an uncommon measure of common sense. He also possessed the valuable attribute of combining a complete independence of judgment with an exceptional gift of working harmoniously with others. He was one of the most valuable contributions America made to the successful prosecution of the War.

I invited this American Mission to 10, Downing Street, on November 20th, 1917, for a consultation on the immediate issues. On our side we had a very full assembly, numbering 25 in all. All the members of the War Cabinet were present. There were also the heads of the State Departments dealing with our war activities—the Foreign Office, Navy, Army, Blockade, Shipping, Food, etc. Admiral Jellicoe as First Sea Lord and Sir William Robertson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff were also present. One feature which lent an added interest to the gathering was that the room where we met was the same one in which, 130 years previously, Lord North had decided and directed the policy which drove the Americans to revolt against the British Crown. I opened my speech to the Conference by referring to this fact.

I then proceeded to sketch briefly the ways in which it seemed to us, with three and a half years of war experience, that America could render most effectual service. This, I explained, was not altogether easy.

“ All the things which are wanted for the efficient conduct of the campaign are urgent, because, naturally, the sooner you are ready, the sooner it will be over. But there are one or two things which



are more urgent than others. After a good deal of consultation with my colleagues and our military and naval advisers, I should put man-power and shipping as the two first demands on your consideration. I am not quite sure which I will put first. I am not sure that you can put either of them before the other, because they are both of the most urgent importance; but if you will permit me, I should like to say a few words upon each."

With regard to man-power, I pointed to the collapse of Russia and Italy, and to the fading man-power of France. The Russian collapse would enable Germany to bring 30 or 40 of her best divisions from the Eastern Front and hurl them against us on the West. The Italian position was not nearly so bad as it had threatened to become a fortnight previously, but it meant that France and Britain had got to pour in very substantial assistance in the form of some of their best divisions, in order to save Italy from collapse. I further pointed out that France herself was very largely exhausted. For this reason there would be on the Allied side a considerably smaller number of troops available next year than there was this year. On the other hand, Germany, owing to the Russian collapse, would have 600,000 more men on the French and Flanders Fronts.

"That shows that it is a matter of the most urgent and immediate importance that you should send to Europe next year, and as early next year as possible, as many men as you can spare, to enable us to withstand any possible German attack. This is apart altogether from the possibility of inflicting any defeat upon them. It is better that I should put the facts quite frankly to you, *because there is a danger that you might think you can work your army up at leisure, and that it does not matter whether your troops are there in 1918 or 1919. But I want you to understand that it might make the most vital difference. . . .*"

I then called attention to the shipping position and the urgency of their taking immediate steps to increase their transport facilities for carrying troops and material to Europe.

"Sixty per cent. of our shipping is engaged on war service, on purely war service, for ourselves and our Allies. In order to show the extent to which we are helping our Allies, 2,600,000 tons of our shipping is devoted exclusively to helping the Allies—France, Russia and Italy—more especially France, and half the time another 2,300,000 tons of shipping as well is directed to the same purpose. Now, we are a country more dependent upon imports than probably any other great country in the world. It is a very small country as you have probably observed in crossing it—a very

small country, and a very thickly populated country. We only grow about one-fifth of the wheat we consume. We are dependent on what we get from overseas for the rest. I am not sure if we cultivated every yard here that we could be self-supporting. . . . Taking the barest essentials not merely of life, but of war, we have also to import a good deal of our ore and other commodities essential to our war equipment. Our exports have almost vanished, except war exports. I should like our American friends to realise what this means to us. The trade of this country is largely an international trade. We manufactured for the world, and we carried for the world, and we did a good deal of financing for the world; all that is practically gone. *We have stripped to the waist for war.* Such exports as there are we have only kept alive, because they are essential in order to enable us to finance certain essential imports in certain parts of the world. . . . There were ships of ours which never came home to this country. We were a people who lent ships and traded in ships. Now the Shipping Controller has brought them home from every part of the world. Why? We have had to get rid of our business, because we want it for war, and to help not merely ourselves, but to help our Allies. I am not sure it is sufficiently realised outside—the extent to which we have put our trade, as it were, into the War. We have risked it all on this great venture.”

I proceeded to give figures to show the extent to which we were cutting down our imports, which by 1918 would have been reduced to less than half their pre-War bulk, not only because of the diversion of shipping to war services for ourselves and our Allies, but of the inroads made on our tonnage and on that of our Allies and neutral countries by the submarine.

“We shall have to ration, not so much for ourselves, but because the French production of food is down to 40 per cent. of what it was before the War, for the simple reason that the peasants who cultivated the soil are now shouldering the rifle instead of following the plough. They are defending their land, and that land is meanwhile getting weedy because the men are not there to cultivate it. The women are doing their best in France, even the old women and children are working, but the soil is getting impoverished, and therefore we have to pool our luck. . . . We have to divert our wheat to save the French and save the Italians—to save the Italians from actual privation.

I met the correspondent of *The Times* in Paris the other day, and he said to me: ‘I have just been through parts of France. I went to a village where they had had no bread for days.’ If that had happened here, Lord Rhondda’s head would have been put on a charger, and probably mine with it, too. The only remark that

correspondent had heard was: 'Well, we are a very patient people.' As M. Clemenceau remarked to me, that is why we have revolutions in France—which is a very shrewd observation. . . . They are holding on with great fortitude, and there is not a single thought of giving in. The Government that proposed to give in would not last 24 hours. In spite of the gigantic losses they have sustained, and of the privations they are facing, France is resolute and as determined as ever she was. We feel it an honour to pool our luck with her, and we have agreed to do it."

These facts, I said, pointed to the need for a big shipping increase. I also asked for supplies of steel plates for Canada and ourselves for shipbuilding.

"To summarise what I have said as to the most important spheres in which the United States can help in the War. The first is that you should help France and the Allies in the battle line with as many men as you can possibly train and equip at the earliest possible moment, so as to be able to sustain the brunt of any German attack in the course of the next year; and the next point is that you should assist to make up the deficit in the shipbuilding tonnage of the year by extending your yards and increasing shipbuilding at an unexampled rate."

I passed on to pay a tribute to the great help which was being rendered by the United States Navy in combating the submarine menace, and to urge consultation with a view to developing our defences for this purpose. I dealt with the need for more aeroplanes. The command of the Air was as essential for victory as the command of the Sea. The Germans were now making a prodigious effort to secure it. In this direction I suggested that the Americans should be able to render very marked service, alike in the manufacture of planes and in the supply of efficient pilots. "Your people have got more than the usual share of enterprise and daring, which are essential qualities in a successful airman. I should have thought that an American naturally would make a first-class fighter in the air, because of those qualities of enterprise and dash and daring which are associated with your race, and which you have displayed on so many battlefields both in peace and in war." The climate too, and the expanse as well as the variety of their territory gave them ample opportunity for training.

I asked, too, for guns. The war was increasingly an artillery conflict, and only a great weight of artillery could make an advance possible without heavy loss. "The more guns the fewer casualties because they destroy the protection which the Germans have set up for their machine-gunners."

I further instanced the need for food supplies, especially now that



the granaries of Russia were closed to us and Australian supplies were too far away to be brought over with our diminished shipping. In conclusion, I paid tribute to the value of the help they were rendering to the Allies in regard to finance and the tightening of the blockade upon Germany.

Admiral Benson replied on behalf of the delegation and opened the discussion upon the issues raised by me. He acknowledged the very full and frank way in which our Government departments had placed at the disposal of the Mission all information bearing on the matters in which they were interested. They had come to realise that they were unprepared with many forms of equipment. "But," he said, "the time has come when we feel that we must get closer together, and we must follow a definite line." He stressed the unity of the States behind the President and their readiness to bring all their resources to aid in securing victory.

As regards shipping, he said that the United States hoped within the next ten months to produce at least 267 destroyers. They were also building 103 submarines. They were not troubling about capital ships but were devoting the rest of their shipbuilding capacity to construction of cargo ships. Food restrictions were being introduced in the States, to release as much food as possible for the needs of the European Allies. In regard to aircraft, it was hoped to be turning them out by hundreds a month in January, and by thousands in May or June. Their "Liberty" motor was yielding excellent results in trials.

In artillery production they were specially devoting themselves to manufacture of guns for use on ships, specially four-inch and five-inch guns for destroyers. Benson also spoke of the extent to which the United States Government was subsidising the erection of additional plant and foundries for the manufacture of arms and war material.

In reply to a question by Lord Derby, he said that when by June they were turning out 4,300 aeroplanes a month, they hoped also to be turning out trained pilots for that number of machines. (These optimistic forecasts never materialised. When the Armistice was signed in November there were no American field guns in France and very few aeroplanes.)

Discussion then passed to the question of tonnage for carrying men and materials to France. Here the figures for the present and near future were far from satisfactory. Mr. Colby said the tonnage at the disposal of the American Army at the moment amounted to 850,000 tons, and of the Navy to 150,000 tons. By January 15th, 1918, there would have been conveyed to France one army corps in addition to the American troops already there. But this army corps would not be completely equipped, and would not have all its transport animals. According to his estimate, the tonnage available would enable the United States to maintain 220,000 men in France.

It was obvious to us all that a force no larger than that would not suffice to turn the scale of victory for the Allies, and thus the tonnage problem became one of predominant importance. The conference proceeded to discuss for some time the possibilities of making fuller and better use of neutral tonnage, and eventually it was decided that a sub-committee should meet that afternoon to thrash out this issue. Lord Curzon, Lord Milner, Lord Robert Cecil and Sir Joseph Maclay were appointed to represent the British, and Messrs. McCormick, Colby, Perkins and Dr. Taylor the Americans. This Committee duly met and after considering various suggestions, decided on measures to secure mutual consultation between Britain and the United States of America on shipping matters, a full analysis of tonnage needs and assets of the Allied and Associated Powers, and a sharing round of the neutral tonnage which had been requisitioned. The United States Government were urged to requisition the 400,000 tons of Dutch shipping then sheltering in United States ports and use it to help in conveying troops and supplies to France.

It was clear that unless a serious effort were made to remedy the situation, the contribution of America would fall far behind what had been reasonably expected of her. Not only was the available tonnage insufficient, but the use being made of it was far from satisfactory. Bungling and delay occurred, of the kind which seems constantly to arise when military or naval officials try to take in hand what is essentially a commercial operation. General Pershing\* complains that the situation as to numbers of troops and supplies at the close of the year was not what the Americans had every reason to expect after having been at war nine months. "We had not obtained full service from the limited amount of tonnage thus far made available for military use. . . . We had less than 175,000 men in France, including about 100,000 in four divisions in various stages of organisation and training, while there should have been at least ten divisions of combat troops and other forces in proportion. It was a very unsatisfactory state of affairs that confronted us, with little prospect of improvement."

Pershing voiced his alarm in a cable to the home Government, in America, on December 20th, 1917, in which he pointed out that the programme supposed to be in operation for the dispatch of American troops would not succeed in placing even three complete corps, with proper proportion of Army troops and auxiliaries, in France by the end of May:—

"The actual facts are that shipments are not even keeping up to that schedule. It is now the middle of December and the first Corps (six divisions) is still incomplete by over two entire divisions and many corps troops. It cannot be too emphatically declared that we should be prepared to take the field with at least four corps (24

\* "My Experiences in the World War," pp. 249-251.

divisions) by 30th June. In view of past performances with tonnage heretofore available such a project is impossible of fulfilment, but only by most strenuous attempts to attain such a result will we be in a position to take a proper part in operations in 1918. . . ."

He pleaded for the allocation of more tonnage for the transport of troops. In his comments upon the situation he remarks: —

"It need hardly be recorded that we were occasioned much embarrassment in facing the Allies with such a poor showing of accomplishment. Up to this time, we had been handicapped in our efforts by lack of aggressive direction of affairs at home. Whether this was due to inefficiency or failure to appreciate the urgency of the situation, the War Department General Staff, as the superior co-ordinating agency, must take the greater part of the blame."

All this sounds curiously like an echo of the kind of experience we in Britain had gone through with some of our War Departments in the earlier stages of the War, but almost incredibly worse.

Had there been available unlimited tonnage and ample port accommodation and clearing facilities at the European side, it would have been possible to bring over in a short space of time a number of complete American formations, and presently place on the French Front an intact American Army, which was the urgent wish of General Pershing. It is true that the troops and the Staff officers lacked experience of the intensive methods of warfare that had been developed in France, and stood in need of the training which a period of brigading with French or British formations could best supply; and the equipment was entirely inadequate. Pershing himself was alarmed at the serious training deficiencies of the units reaching him in France. These deficiencies could, however, have been corrected once the troops were on French soil and in direct contact with the great Armies of France and Britain, and with the enormous war supplies accumulated by the Allies the American shortage in essentials could have been made up. Here with our three years of experience of actual war we could have helped them to expedite their training. There would have been no language impediment.

The advent of the American troops, in fact, presented a series of problems. There was first the tonnage problem. Then there was the difficulty presented by the bottle-neck of the French ports, cramped, congested, a fertile source of intolerable delay. Then there was the question of whether the American troops should be retained in intact American corps formation, or whether their battalions should be brigaded with French and British divisions, for a time at least, to gain better experience of the War, and to render help to our depleted



forces earlier than it would be possible for them to do if they were kept waiting until the full personnel and equipment of entire divisions could be brought over and organised.

This last, in view of the tonnage shortage, was a burning issue. Time was of the essence of victory. A given amount of shipping could bring over a large body of infantry, capable of powerfully reinforcing the thinning lines of the Allies. But if the same amount of shipping had to bring over the full personnel and equipment of divisions intact, including their artillery, baggage trains, H.Q. Staffs and details and all the paraphernalia with which a wealthy country could load up its forces, then the actual number of combatant troops which could be brought to France within a given period was drastically reduced. Throughout the winter and spring of 1917-18 an incessant argument was going on between the Americans and the Allies as to which course should be followed. The French and British, painfully conscious of the exhaustion of their reserves by four costly campaigns, and of the imminence of a powerful attack by increased and rapidly increasing German forces, were anxious that the cramped flow of troops from across the Atlantic should consist in the largest possible measure of fighting units which could be used in emergency to stop the gaps and the thin patches in the line. That would involve these troops being incorporated for the time being in French and British divisions, since the personnel and material for making them up into intact American divisions would not be available for several more months. But here Pershing was stubbornly insistent that he wanted, at the earliest possible moment, to form an independent American Army, with its own bases and transport communications, its own part of the front, all under his separate command. The reason he gave for this was that national prestige and public sentiment in the United States required this, and that to merge the American forces with those of their Allies could be naturally and properly resented and would give a handle for pro-German agitation in the States. In this argument there was doubtless considerable force. He was afraid that if once he let his battalions be brigaded into French or British divisions he would never see them again. To withdraw them later might be a practical impossibility. Had war preparations been taken in hand promptly and effectively the question would not have arisen, for the United States might have raised, trained, equipped and sent to France in 1917 a force of at least a score of complete divisions ready to take part in the impending struggle. But we had to deal with a situation for which the delays of American war direction were largely responsible.

The matter was so urgent that on December 15th I had cabled to Colonel House as follows: —

“ Having regard to Russian situation and the fact that both guns and troops are being rapidly transferred from the Eastern to the

Western Front, the Cabinet are anxious that an immediate decision should be come to in regard to the inclusion with the British units of regiments or companies of American troops, an idea which was discussed with you at Paris. In the near future and throughout the earlier months of next year the situation on the Western Front may become exceedingly serious, and it may become of vital importance that the American man-power available in France should be immediately used, more especially as it would appear that the Germans are calculating on delivering a knock-out blow to the Allies before a fully trained American Army is fit to take its part in the fighting.

LLOYD GEORGE."

The American Government naturally sympathised with Pershing's point of view. But they were unwilling to press their insistence upon the independent ordering of American troops to a point which might gravely handicap military operations. On December 20th, 1917, we received a copy of a cable which Newton D. Baker, the American Secretary of War, intended issuing to General Pershing, which said:—

"Both English and French are pressing upon the President their desires to have your forces amalgamated with theirs by regiment and companies, and both express the belief in impending heavy drive by Germans somewhere along the lines of the Western Front. We do not desire loss of identity of our forces but regard that as secondary to the meeting of any critical situation by the most helpful use possible of the troops at your command. . . . The President however desires you to have full authority to use the forces at your command as you deem wise in consultation with the French and British Commanders-in-Chief. . . ."

I found Mr. Baker able, broadminded and understanding in the dealings I had with him during the War. This cable is an illustration of his general attitude. He was not responsible for the delays which occurred in reaching even a half-satisfactory settlement of this troublesome question. Against the stickiness of the professional general officer standing for his rights, intelligence and common sense struggled in vain. Mr. Newton Baker discovered that stubborn fact during the War.

In the course of the discussions the suggestion had been mooted that if the Americans would consent to send over infantry formations in advance of full divisional staffs, for temporary brigading with British units, we might make an effort to allocate extra tonnage for their transport. This promise produced some effect. On January 2nd, 1918, Pershing had an interview with Haig, at which the latter explained how he would propose to use and train such American

battalions with his divisions, and gradually, as the American element increased, turn them into American divisions forming the American Army.

Sir William Robertson, our C.I.G.S., had an interview ten days later with General Pershing, which he described as "not very satisfactory." In his note of this interview, he said that General Pershing apparently had never seriously considered the proposal I had sent to Colonel House, although the memorandum of the subject had been shown him by House.

"The fact is, he does not like the proposal because, (a) he is anxious to bring over his divisions, as such; (b) he naturally prefers to preserve national identity and argues, quite rightly, that American battalions cannot be expected to do as well in British as in American divisions. The result of the interview was that he will forward our proposal to his Government giving it a mild form of support and telegraphing me a copy of the communication he sends. . . ."

Robertson went on to describe the demand of General Pershing for more tonnage, in which he asked that it should be used, not to bring over infantry alone, but intact divisions.

"I had repeatedly to remind him that whereas the tonnage we can find will bring over some 150,000 to 200,000 infantry (say 150 battalions) who can be fighting in three or four months, it cannot bring over more than about three divisions (36 battalions) who will not be fighting for at least six months. Eventually he admitted the force of this argument. I added that the British Government could not, for the sake of these three divisions, run the great risks incurred in cutting down our stocks of food and war material in order to provide the special tonnage, though they would do so for the sake of the infantry reinforcements."

That passage from Robertson's memorandum sums up the problem with which we were confronted at this stage. I had correctly told the American Mission that we had no tonnage to spare to help them in bringing over their troops. We had not enough, in fact, to meet what had been regarded as the minimum needs for transport for our armies and Allies and our essential requirements at home. Yet if it became a life and death issue, where extra American troops promptly thrown in would turn the scale between victory and defeat, we came to the conclusion that it would be worth while to take the risk of even letting our own and Allied stocks of food and raw materials run down while we diverted tonnage to bring those extra troops to France. But it would not be worth our while to take that gravely hazardous step



unless the tonnage so spared were utilised to its utmost capacity to bring over fighting troops. If it were merely going to carry across numbers of divisional H.Q. details and non-combatant personnel and equipment in order to minister to the pride and enhance the consequence of a single General, we could find a far more urgent use for it. Pershing demanded the ships, but would only bring over intact divisions in them. Germany brought over from the Russian Front hordes of fighting men to incorporate in their depleted divisions, and even the complete divisions they transported to the West did not carry with them their full quota of behind-the-line services.

General Robertson's memorandum concluded with a pessimistic account of the prospects which, if perhaps rather exaggerated, was quite a characteristic grumble about foreigners of all sorts and kinds:—

“I have never been very sanguine as to American assistance in any form this year, and I must tell the War Cabinet that I have returned still less sanguine. The raising of new armies is a tremendous task for any country, and although one might expect that America, with her two previous experiences, and her supposed great business and hustling qualities, would do better than other countries, the fact is that she is doing very badly. . . . The French have lost all patience, and their relations with the Americans are the reverse of good. The French are always much too optimistic in such matters, but they may well be excused for being dissatisfied in the present case. The Americans are proceeding as if they had years in which to prepare. They have laid out cantonment areas for ten divisions, and are building the most luxurious huts to supplement billets; each man has a *bed* and three blankets. . . .

My general impression is that America's power to help us to win the War—that is to help us to defeat the Germans in battle—is a very weak reed to lean upon at present, and will continue to be so for a very long time to come unless she follows up her words with actions much more practical and energetic than any she has yet taken.”

It is almost amusing to compare this melancholy vaticination with the actual subsequent history of the American armies. Nevertheless there is no doubt that American effort at this stage sadly needed quickening. The fact that the principal military adviser of the British Government made such a report shows that at the time he was getting badly rattled at the alarming hang-back in the progress of America's military contribution to the Allied cause.

I promptly sent off a telegram to Colonel House on January 15th, 1918, informing him of the upshot of Robertson's interview with Pershing, and urging that Washington should authorise the proposed

arrangement to provide the maximum man-power for France by temporarily attaching American troops to British divisions. I stated the proposal as follows:—

“ . . . We have examined the question of sea transport carefully, and find that by making large temporary sacrifices in our food imports we could bring over about 150,000 American infantry, that is, 150 battalions, during the next three or four months, without in any way interfering with present arrangements for bringing over American divisions. We can arrange to feed these battalions, to supply all additional equipment, and to provide necessary training facilities. If these battalions were temporarily incorporated in British formations it would give us invaluable aid during the next critical six months. Later in the year they could, if desired, be withdrawn and incorporated in American divisions.

If the above amount of shipping were allotted to bringing American divisions with full equipment over, not more than three could be brought, and further the time required to train divisions for the field is much longer than for companies or battalions. The Government does not feel justified in asking our people to bear the great additional sacrifices which diversion of shipping will entail for the sake of the assistance of three divisions at a distant date. . . .”

There can be little doubt that at this time there was a lack of hearty co-operation between the American General and his French and British colleagues. In his own comment upon his interview with Robertson (described in Robertson's Memorandum to which I have referred), Pershing declares that:—

“ The arguments General Robertson advanced clearly indicated that the British were playing for advantage to themselves in offering to transport our troops. In other words, they had the shipping to transport American battalions on condition that they would serve in the British armies. Their purpose was to build up their own units instead of aiding the cause in general by augmenting the number of complete combat divisions on the Western Front.”\*

That suggestion shows a real lack of understanding of the desperate straits in which we were by that time for tonnage, and a somewhat unworthy suspicion that we were playing for a selfish advantage when in a matter of fact our one concern was to avoid a disastrous setback to the Allied Armies. As time went on, the Americans were persuaded by the spectacle of disaster threatening the cause they had espoused, and as far as American statesmen were concerned this attitude of distrust gave way to a sounder understanding and franker co-operation. But for the time being it created a good deal of difficulty which hampered the adoption of wise arrangements.

\* “ My Experiences in the World War,” p. 259.

At a meeting of the War Cabinet on January 25th, 1918, the Director of Military Operations read extracts from a French report concerning the state of the American Army. It was expected that there would be eight divisions in France in March, 14 in June, and 20 in September, 1918, and 28 in January, 1919, but these divisions would require six months' training in France before they would be fit to take an active part in operations. Hence at this rate by July only four trained divisions could be counted on, and by October only eight, with perhaps four half-trained divisions fit for a quiet sector. At the present moment there was one efficient division, and a second was now about to receive its first trench training.

It was asked whether these figures were independent of the 150,000 lately promised. The answer was in the affirmative.

It was also asked whether these 150,000 men would be as slow to become efficient as the divisions referred to in the French report.

The Director of Military Operations pointed out that battalions could be trained in one-sixth of the time required for the training of a division. If the transport of these troops began at once, we should have some of these battalions in the line in May.

The Secretary of State for War expressed a fear that the tonnage available for the transport of these troops was going to be cut down. He also adverted to the very backward state of the training of the American infantry.

On January 26th, 1918, General Robertson had long interviews in France with Pershing and Bliss about the issue. In a despatch of that date to the Secretary of State for War, he reported his interview, and complained that although Bliss and Pershing had been given authority by Washington to make arrangements for the 150 battalion project, they were afraid to take any responsibility for it. Bliss was taking his stand upon the American Military Programme which had laid down that 24 American divisions were to be in France by July—a programme which, in the absence of American shipping, there seemed at that time not the slightest prospect of realising—and was insisting that assent to our offer to bring over 150 battalions should be conditional upon our providing further shipping to enable the Americans to carry out their 24 division programme. Pershing gave Robertson a nasty jar by telling him he had not after all indicated to Washington that he was prepared to approve the 150 battalion proposal; he had gone no further than to say that it needed serious consideration. He stood still on the ground of national prestige, and would only consider letting us have temporary use of American battalions for training on condition that we brought over their full divisional personnel at the same time, a proposal which in Robertson's view was hardly worth accepting.

The issue was finally cleared up at a Conference held at Versailles on January 29th. General Pershing, General Bliss, and an A.D.C.



represented America, while I had with me Lord Milner, Robertson, Haig, Wilson and Hankey.

As explained by Bliss, the position was that the original American programme had envisaged the transport of 12 American divisions to France by June, 1918. After the pressure brought to bear on them in November to increase their dispatch of troops, they had put forward a programme to raise this number to 24. But while half the tonnage for this new programme was to be raised by Washington, the remainder would have to be provided by Britain, which had declared it could not do this. So they had fallen back on the original programme of two divisions a month. Now there was this further proposal for providing British tonnage to bring over additional American troops, in regard to which General Pershing demanded that it should take the form of bringing the fighting personnel of complete divisions, artillery as well as infantry.

In reply to a question from me, Pershing explained that he had not expressed approval of Robertson's proposal to bring 150 infantry battalions. He had merely referred it to Washington for serious consideration, and had subsequently cabled his Government on the importance of keeping the American troops under command of their own officers. We discussed at some length the pros and cons of Robertson's scheme, but it was clear that Pershing had a rooted objection to it. Eventually the meeting was adjourned until the following day, when Pershing produced a memorandum setting out in brief his objections to Robertson's scheme, and his counter-proposal, which we had no alternative but to adopt. This latter part of the Memorandum was as follows:—

"In order to meet the situation, as presented by General Sir William Robertson, and hasten the arrival and training of American troops, it is therefore proposed that the British Government use the available sea transportation in question for bringing over the personnel of entire American divisions under the following conditions:—

1. That the infantry and auxiliary troops of these divisions be trained with British divisions by battalions, or under such plan as may be agreed upon;
2. That the artillery be trained under American direction in the use of French *matériel* as at present;
3. That the higher commanders and staff officers be assigned for training and experience with corresponding units for the British Army;
4. That when sufficiently trained, these battalions be reformed into regiments, and that when the artillery is fully trained, all the units comprising each division be united under their own officers for service;

5. That the above plan be carried out without interference with the plans now in operation for bringing over American forces;
6. That the question of supply be arranged by agreement between the British and American Commanders-in-Chief;
7. That questions of arms and equipment be settled in similar manner."

We thus conceded the issue on which Pershing had taken his stand, as to the maintenance of the American divisional formations and the refusal to amalgamate for fighting purposes the American infantry, except temporarily, while training, with our forces. The decision went some way towards improving matters. In the event of a grave emergency it would ensure the presence on French soil of a considerable number of American troops who had received a certain amount of training by officers with a war experience. Haig declared two days later, at a meeting of the Supreme War Council on January 30th, that he did not consider the Allies could expect the American force to be of effective support this year.

At the time the American effort certainly appeared disappointing. The Director of Military Intelligence read to the War Cabinet, at their meeting on January 31st, 1918, extracts from a letter he had received from General Wagstaff at American General Headquarters. The letter stated that there was great enthusiasm among American divisions about to go into the line, and also that much satisfaction had been expressed by the American troops when they heard of the possibility of their battalions being incorporated in British formations. The letter also stated that the latter proposal had been well received by the American people. At the end of February, Pershing notes:—

"It was depressing to think that ten months had elapsed since our entry into the War and we were just barely ready with one division of 25,000 men. With all our wealth, our man-power and our ability, this was the net result of our efforts up to the moment. . . . Here we were likely to be confronted by the mightiest military offensive that the world had ever known and it looked as though we should be compelled to stand by almost helpless and see the Allies again suffer losses of hundreds of thousands of men in their struggle against defeat."

By that date, February 28th, 1918, the total strength of the American Expeditionary Force in France was just over a quarter of a million. But a high proportion were not combatants, but men occupied with the non-combatant services necessary for the maintenance of the force, and the bulk of the rest were imperfectly trained. Describing the nature of the American Army three weeks later, General Pershing writes:—

"The crisis had found us with less than 320,000 officers and men in France, of which about 100,000 were necessarily engaged in the Services of Supply."

Of the combatants only a minority were in divisional formations capable of engaging in battle operations at that time.

That was the position when we passed into the fateful month of March, 1918. General Pershing, fighting fiercely to ensure the corporate unity of the American forces in France, had been successful in defeating every proposition which seemed to him to entail a possible threat to that unity. His success had meant that there were far fewer fighting troops from the States in France than there would have been had the proposals of the French and British authorities been adopted. On the other hand, the ultimate formation of intact American divisions was facilitated as a result of his stand. This would have been poor compensation had we in the meantime lost the War; but he is entitled to point out that in fact we did not lose it, and that if we had made the distribution of our forces suggested by Foch and supported by the American Generals, we need not have lost a single battle.

When the German blow fell on the St. Quentin Front on March 1st, 1918, the American troops in France numbered about 300,000. They included one fully trained division, the 1st, and two more, the 2nd and 42nd, who were training on quiet sectors of the French Front south of Verdun, while the 26th was in reserve by the Chemin des Dames. Plans were on foot to set up the first American Army corps, bringing these divisions into line beside the 1st Division. But the sudden crisis postponed that move for the time, and also brought about a fresh development in the programme for shipping American troops.

By March 25th we were able to gauge in some measure the force of the German onslaught, and the gravity of the peril which was threatening the Allied Front. It was clear that to restore our broken line we should have need of every man the Allies could rally, and as I relate elsewhere, most drastic steps were taken to bring out from Britain all the troops that could be mustered, and by raising the age limit and combing over again the scanty remnant of fit men still retained in important civilian services, to squeeze into the Army everyone we could find. The urgency of getting as many combatant troops as possible from the United States grew more than ever apparent, and I felt certain that in this emergency the American authorities would see the force of our plea that while the crisis lasted the transport of fighting troops ought to have priority over that of divisional personnel of a non-combatant character.

Accordingly, on March 25th, Mr. Balfour and I had an interview with Mr. Baker, at which we pleaded for a modification of American policy in this direction. The nature of our suggestions is set out in a



telegram which, after the interview, was sent by Mr. Balfour to Colonel House. It ran as follows:—

“ Prime Minister and I saw Mr. Baker this morning and earnestly pressed upon him the urgency of obtaining from the proper authorities assent to the following suggestions:—

First. That the four American divisions should be used at once to hold the line and relieve further French divisions.

Second. We understand that transport is available for bringing six complete American divisions to this country. We strongly urge that, in the present crisis, this tonnage would be more usefully employed if it were not used to carry complete divisions with their full complement of artillery, etc., but if it were used in the main for the transport of infantry, of which, at this moment, we stand in most pressing need.

Third. That, as a temporary expedient, American engineer units in France now engaged in preparing the bases and lines of communication of the future American Army and said to include many skilled engineers, should be diverted from present occupations and utilised as extemporised engineer units for construction of defences, etc., in rear of our armies.

Fourth. That one of the American displacement divisions, which is reported to be complete with transport, should also be employed in the line, either as a separate division, or to increase the infantry in the combatant divisions.

Mr. Baker seemed personally favourable to these suggestions.”

Mr. Baker himself sent a telegram to General Pershing describing these proposals. His comment upon them to the General was:—

“ No answer to the foregoing is necessary until I see you tomorrow when we can discuss the suggestions fully. If railroads in France are too fully occupied to make the Italian trip possible I should abandon it. At any rate we should not permit diversion of engines and cars if they can be used in present emergency. . . . ”

Colonel House replied on the 26th to Mr. Balfour's cable, saying that he had passed it to the President with his urgent recommendation that orders should be issued on the lines suggested. He added an expression of confidence in the courage and tenacity of the British troops which were then undergoing the immense strain of the German attack. On the 27th we had a further telegram from him saying:—

“ The President agrees with practically every suggestion that you make regarding the disposition of our Army. I am glad to

inform you that Secretary Baker, after consulting with Generals Bliss and Pershing, has given orders making effective the recommendations set forth in your telegram."

On the same day a resolution recommending the same policy was unanimously adopted by the Military Representatives at Versailles, one of whom it will be remembered was General Bliss. Its text ran:—

"The Military Representatives are of opinion that it is highly desirable that the American Government should assist the Allied Armies as soon as possible by permitting, in principle, the temporary service of American units in Allied army corps and divisions, such reinforcements must however be obtained from other units than those American divisions which are now operating with the French, and the units so temporarily employed must eventually be returned to the American Army.

The Military Representatives are of opinion that, for the present time, in execution of the foregoing, and until otherwise directed by the Supreme War Council, only American infantry and machine-gun units, organised as the Government may decide, be brought to France, and that all agreements or conventions hitherto made in conflict with this decision be modified accordingly."

All who have not experienced the vainglorious inflexibility of the professional mind where questions of status and authority are concerned would think that an order from the head of the Government countersigned by the Secretary for War would have settled this unfortunate dispute.

When General Pershing learnt of this resolution he was thoroughly upset, for it seemed to him that here was another attempt to rob him of his American Army. He got hold of Secretary Baker, and laid his misgivings before him. To meet them, Baker sent a covering note to President Wilson with the recommendations of the military representatives, in which he suggested that their proposals ought to be conceded only in view of the present critical situation, and continued only so long as that situation necessarily demands it." He proposed that the President, in endorsing the recommendations, should lay it down specifically that:—

"Such units when transported will be under the direction of the Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces and will be assigned for training and use by him in his discretion. He will use these and all other military forces of the United States under his command in such manner as to render the greatest

military assistance, keeping in mind always the determination of this Government to have its various military forces collected, as speedily as their training and the military situation will permit, into an independent American Army. . . .”

This specification of the conditions under which the proposals of the Military Representatives were to be applied was in due course approved by President Wilson. It practically left action entirely to the discretion of General Pershing. The one preoccupation of the French and British was to make the best use of all the forces available in order to bring this devastating war to a victorious end at the earliest possible date. Protracted negotiations with and between Generals to persuade the one or other of them to do what was to any sensible person obviously the best in the circumstances were wasting precious time and opportunity. And we had to secure the advent of the American troops at as early a date as possible. We did what we could to rouse public opinion in America with this in view. On March 27th I cabled a message to Lord Reading for communication to the President and the American public:—

“We are at the crisis of the War. Attacked by an immense superiority of German troops our Army has been forced to retire. The retirement has been carried out methodically before the pressure of a steady succession of fresh German reserves which are suffering enormous losses. The situation is being faced with splendid courage and resolution. The dogged pluck of our troops has for the moment checked the ceaseless onrush of the enemy and the French have now joined in the struggle. But this battle, the greatest and most momentous in the history of the world is only just beginning. Throughout it French and British are buoyed up with the knowledge that the great Republic of the West will neglect no effort which can hasten its troops and its ships to Europe. In war, time is vital. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of getting American reinforcements across the Atlantic in the shortest possible space of time.”

On the same day, Lord Reading cabled an appreciation of the situation in the United States which ran as follows:—

“Effect of the great battle on American public opinion is wholly advantageous to the Allied cause. Nothing has occurred since America entered the War which has stirred more fully the national feeling or united the people so thoroughly against Germany. Display of German military power is a shock to America and the people at large realise for the first time that the Allies in general and England in particular have been standing between her and German militarism. It has produced feeling of admiration and



sympathy for the British, quite contrary to the usual attitude. People of America are for the War and anxious to know how they can most effectively help. They have realised as it were in a flash their own military shortcomings and time they have lost since they entered the War. This has already produced outburst in the Press and Congress, which naturally enough takes form of attack on the Administration. . . . To the Administration the battle has been no less of a shock. They had hoped and believed that the effect of the President's speeches had been to strengthen Liberal party in Germany and sap morale of the Army and influence of the military party. To-day they are very conscious of their delusion and realise that there is no hope that speeches and propaganda will turn the German people against their military party or detach Austria from Germany. At last they face the fact that, if Germany is to be beaten, she must be beaten by force. . . ."

These last sentences account for the lack of energetic direction in organising the war resources of the States.

It seems amazing to those who did not appreciate President Wilson's psychology and his unbounded confidence in the crystallisation of ideals that after a year of participation in the War—in a war which had been going on for nearly four years—the Americans were only now waking up to a full realisation that they could not win unless they fought, and fought hard. The high-minded President persisted in believing that eloquent appeals to righteousness would arrest the march of victorious armies. Once blood is shed in a national quarrel reason and right are swept aside by the rage of angry men. Yet passages I have quoted from General Pershing's own statements show how difficult he had found it to rouse his administration at home to real activity and energetic action; and similar attempts by the French and British had been viewed with considerable suspicion by the Americans, who seemed always afraid that they were being made the victims of some confidence trick by the designing diplomats of Europe. The grim reality of this big German smash-through in the West was needed to bring home to them that they were really participating in an elemental struggle with a system where force was a faith and the triumph of which was dependent on the unchallengeable supremacy of the sword.

On March 28th, I received through the American Ambassador a message from Baker telling me that Pershing had placed the four American divisions with trench experience at Pétain's disposal, and that they were being put into the line to relieve French divisions for service on the front of attack; and that for the moment British shipping could give precedence to bringing over the infantry of the six American divisions we had been about to convey to France. I replied

Mr. Page:—

"29th March, 1918.

Dear Mr. Ambassador,

Thank you very much for the message from Secretary Baker. Will you please convey to him my heartiest thanks for the prompt and efficient assistance which he and General Pershing have rendered in this critical time. The news has been greatly appreciated by the War Cabinet.

Yours sincerely,

D. LLOYD GEORGE."

About nine o'clock that morning, after thinking things over during a walk in the Park with my secretary, Mr. (now Sir) John Davies, I walked straight to the Adjutant-General's Department in the War Office to ascertain the exact numerical position of the Armies in France. I decided in order to expedite matters to make a personal appeal to President Wilson so as to secure his direct, urgent and authoritative intervention with the American military authorities in the States and in France.

I then sent a long cable to Lord Reading for communication to President Wilson, outlining the situation and the steps which seemed to me of first importance in order to deal with it. The message ran as follows:—

"We have now had time to consider the military problem in more detail. We have good hope of being able to check the enemy's present effort, but we may lose Amiens. The near future will show whether or not he will be able to reach that place. If he succeeds in doing this the military situation will be very grave. In any case, having undoubtedly proved his capacity to break through the Western Front on a wide front, *it is certain that his military command, if unable to obtain all they aimed at in this battle, will immediately begin to refit the army for another blow at the earliest possible moment.* Where he will deliver it will largely depend on the final result of the present operations. The whole military future will depend upon our being able to refit and maintain our armies in time to be able to counter his next blow. Looking past the immediate battle the fundamental problem before the Allies is that of man-power.

Our losses up to the present in this battle which has only lasted a week amount to about 120,000 men. By drafting in all our resources in trained and partially trained men we can barely make this good, and in so doing we shall have used up all our trained reserves. We are, therefore, taking immediate action to raise troops by increasing the military age to 50, and taking boys of 18, and by making another large comb-out of industry, a proceeding which will cause the gravest dislocation and hardship to

our industries. We are also prepared to face great trouble in Ireland, because we feel that it is vital that we should be able to prove ourselves stronger than the Germans this summer.

Yet, though by these drastic measures we hope to obtain a reinforcement of between 400,000 and 500,000 men for our Army, they will not be sufficiently trained for use in France for at least four months. There will be a dangerous gap in the months of May, June and July—that is to say, about the time when we may expect the enemy to make his next great effort. If we are therefore to make sure of holding the enemy then, and preventing him from reaching a decision in the West, the deficiency during these months must be made good by American troops. In no other way can we make the Allied position secure.

It is estimated by our shipping people here that if shipping is to be provided by Great Britain at a great sacrifice in other directions, we shall be able to embark in America in April some 60,000 men. Admiral Sims estimates that the carrying capacity of the American troop fleet is 52,000 men a month. In addition there is certain Dutch tonnage available for use by America, and we are obtaining the use of certain Italian tonnage. In all we believe that 120,000 American men can be embarked in April and rather more in the succeeding months.

I want you, therefore, to formally urge upon the President on behalf of the British Government to give instructions for 120,000 infantry to be embarked and sent to Europe per month between now and the end of July—the battalions of these American regiments to be brigaded with British or French divisions on the same basis as arranged in the case of the six divisions plan. In accordance with the resolution of the Military Representatives at Versailles on March 27th and agreed to by General Pershing the troops transported should be infantry and machine-gun units only. As was agreed in the case of the six divisions, the battalions when trained can be reformed into regiments and sent to General Pershing as he may require them.

Please see the President about this at once. In no other way can the hundreds of thousands of trained and half-trained men now in America be made available in this struggle; for they cannot be organised into separate units in time. Should it go against us in their absence the War might be over and the cause for which the President has so eloquently pleaded might be lost without America being given an opportunity to put in more than an insignificant fraction of her Army. I believe that the whole future of the War will depend on whether the Allies or the Germans are first in making good the losses of this great battle. The Germans will certainly not delay an instant. They have the man-power with which to replace their losses. There are also the



Austrians of whom, according to the German papers to-day, there are already 250,000 on the Western Front.\* Unless we can refit as fast as they can, we shall simply give Germany the chance to deliver that knock-out blow with which its leaders hope to win the War."

A very satisfactory reply was received from President Wilson to this request. Lord Reading cabled me on March 31st to inform me that the President had substantially agreed to my proposals; that he would issue directions for 120,000 infantry a month to be embarked during April, May, June and July, if the necessary shipping and equipment were available; and that only the limitations of shipping and port facilities hindered him from sending them faster. He also approved in principle the method of employment of troops suggested by me, but left the details of their disposal and use to be settled by General Pershing.

That was all to the good, but hitherto we had unfortunate evidence of the gap between programme and performance in the dispatch of American troops. In a private message which I sent to Reading on April 1st, I asked him to give his personal attention to the measures to carry out the President's undertaking pointing out that:—

"We have been let down badly once or twice before; in fact, we are largely suffering because the Americans have fallen egregiously short of their programme. They promised to have 17 divisions in France by March, they have actually only four, and these have only just gone into the line. . . ."

I followed this up by a longer cable next day, in which I reinforced my plea for every effort being made to ensure the actual dispatch of the promised troops. I told Reading that I thought he ought in particular to get Colonel House to give his whole time to this question, "as if it were an election campaign," until it was certain that the 120,000 American infantry were going, in fact and not merely on paper, in April and each succeeding month. I concluded by giving some particulars of the shipping arrangements we were making. Food supplies at home were running short and our wheat reserves were low. But I came to the conclusion that we should take even the grave risks of having to cut down our bread rations in order to provide ships for this pressing need in France. So in my further message for the President I said:—

"The estimates which follow relate to all troops other than those arriving under ordinary American War Office programmes.

\* This was a German bluff to create an atmosphere of terror on the Allied side. There were at this time no Austrian divisions on the Western Front. The first to come there arrived in July.

But they include the six divisions which it was arranged at last Supreme War Council should be sent over to be brigaded with us and the French. Of these I understand that only 1,700 men have so far started.

It is estimated that 61,000 troops can be embarked in British tonnage in April in accommodation becoming available apart from unforeseen contingencies at the rate of 16,000 in each first and third weeks, 12,000 in second week, and 17,000 in the fourth week of the month. This does not include two Italian ships which will also be available. Practically all the men carried in British tonnage will be brought to England and transported to Northern French ports by us. This leaves Brest and the Bay ports free to deal with the men carried direct to France by American shipping. Please obtain from American authorities at once similar estimate of numbers which can be carried in tonnage provided by America during the four weeks, including such of the Dutch ships or other Allied tonnage as are suitable and available. It is vital that we should have this time-table as soon as possible in order that we may complete arrangements with Pershing in regard to reception, training and brigading with Allied forces.

It is also very important that the vessels of the American line be fitted and used to carry the full number of men of which they are capable. Up to the present they have been carrying less than 1,000 men per voyage. If they were fitted up as our troopships they could carry 2,000 to 2,500. *Mongolia* and *Manchuria* could carry from 2,500 to 3,000."

Reading, with his usual tact and business aptitude, urged all these points on the President. In addition he kept in constant touch with the American military and transport departments. The Allies owed a good deal to his efficient activities. But a few days later this whole programme was threatened anew with disaster—and from the same quarter which had so far wrecked every arrangement. General Pershing rose up in angry protest against this last compact. He was quivering with suspicion that the French and British meant to rob him of his army and that once the American infantry got brigaded with European formations he would be unable to recover them. In conference with Generals Whigham and Hutchison from the British War Office, on April 7th, he flatly refused to accept the 20,000 a month programme for transport of infantry and machine-gunners. He would agree to no more than the 60,000 infantry for which arrangements had already been made to be given priority.

On April 8th I talked the matter over with the Foreign Secretary and we decided to communicate with the President and once more seek his intervention. Mr. Balfour accordingly sent a long cable to Lord Reading, acquainting him with the grave difference of opinion

which we had discovered in discussing the arrangements with General Pershing, and asked him to lay the issue before President Wilson.

"I am very unwilling," he cabled, "to embarrass the President, who has shown such a firm grasp of the situation, with criticisms of his officers. But it is evident that the difference of opinion between General Pershing on the one side and what we conceive to be the President's policy on the other is so fundamental and touches so nearly the issues of the whole War, that we are bound to have the matter cleared up."

The reply we received on April 10th from Lord Reading told us that he had seen President Wilson, who, while showing sympathy with our anxiety to secure an arrangement which would facilitate the best and promptest use of American forces, was evidently very unwilling to commit himself to a decision in regard to the dispute with General Pershing until he had consulted Baker, then on his way to the States. So despite the urgency of the issue, it had to stand over a few days, pending Baker's arrival in the United States.

The present position of the American Army was outlined by General Whigham to the War Cabinet at a meeting held on April 10th. He stated that General Pershing then had in France the 1st American Army Corps, consisting of four fighting and two replacement divisions, one of which was now being equipped to become a fighting division. The ration strength of the American Forces in France was 319,000, and the nominal combatant strength was 214,000, but this included up to the present only about 70,000 infantry for the fighting line. In the United Kingdom there were 10,000 American troops, including three-quarters of one battalion, and various portions of other units and details. The total striking force of this army, it thus appeared, was not for the moment very considerable. This was 12 months after the American declaration of war. I ascertained that at the corresponding period of our entry into the War we had 942,507 men (excluding Indian troops) in the various theatres and our actual casualties were 312,075—this also excludes the Indian troops.

We also learned at this Cabinet meeting the disquieting tidings that the American authorities were refusing to allow shipment of any of their troops in vessels with a speed of less than  $12\frac{1}{2}$  knots. We had scraped together every vessel that could possibly be spared for troop transport, and some of these were slower ships, with a speed of only  $9\frac{1}{2}$  knots. The refusal to allow the use of these would cut down by about 7,000 men per month the number we could transport. There was considerable cabling and consultation about this matter. Eventually a compromise was reached allowing American troops to be sent on vessels having a speed of not less than  $11\frac{1}{2}$  knots, and



extensive work on the part of Graeme Thomson, whom I had sent to the States to assist the shipping programme, resulted in tonnage becoming available which would enable us to transport up to 200,000 men per month; considerably more, in fact, than our original programme.

But the problem remained as to whether arrangements could be agreed which would permit of these men being of any practical fighting value within the next few weeks—critical weeks for the issue of the War. The blunt truth was that in Pershing's view the building up of an American Army took precedence of the utilisation of these men to beat off the German offensive, while for us the defeat of the offensive and the consequent shortening of this destructive War was all-important. An American Army which could not be organised into an army until the late summer or autumn would be too late to intervene in this fateful conflict.

On April 18th, in anticipation of the next phase of the discussion between President Wilson, Mr. Baker and Lord Reading, I sent to the last-named a lengthy memorandum in which I set out the facts and arguments for allowing the American troops, brigaded in British and French divisions, to be used forthwith to aid in repelling the Germans, instead of waiting until Pershing could set up divisional formations and pass his troops through a period of training in them. I gave particulars of the German forces opposed to us, and their potential reserves; and of our forces and available reinforcements. I described the difficulties in the way of the French moving up any considerable body of troops into the imperilled northern area, because of the difficulty of maintaining their communication lines right across ours; and in any case the French had now a very long line of their own to guard. Our casualties in the recent fighting had been such that several of our divisions were reduced to their cadres, and since the Germans were still able to bring in further forces from the East, the disproportion of fighting strength was steadily increasing. My conclusion was that:—

“There can be little doubt that victory or defeat for the Allies depends upon the arrival of the American infantry. . . . For the moment infantry and machine-gunners are the only troops which matter, for the wastage of infantry is out of all proportion to that of the artillery and other services. Barring disaster it will not be impossible to keep the latter up to strength. The real fact is that the Allies have the necessary reserves of sufficiently trained infantry to make it impossible for the Germans to succeed. But these reserves are now largely in America. . . . It rests with America to win or lose the decisive battle of the War. But if it is to be won, America will have to move as she has never moved before, and the President must overrule at once the narrow obstinacy

which would put obstacles in the way of using American infantry in the only way in which it can be used to save the situation. . . .”

Lord Reading had a series of conferences with Baker and President Wilson, the outcome of which was a compromise agreement, set forth in a memorandum of which, on April 21st, he cabled me the terms as follows: —

“ Pursuant to direction of the President and in conformity with his approval of joint note of Permanent Military Representatives at Versailles, United States will continue throughout the months of April, May, June and July to supply for transportation, both in its own and controlled tonnage and in that made available by Great Britain, infantry and machine-gun personnel. It is hoped, and on the basis of study so far it is believed, that total number of troops transported will be 120,000 per month. These troops when transported will, under direction and at the discretion of General Pershing, be assigned for training and use with British, French or American divisions as exigencies of the situation from time to time require: it being understood that this programme to the extent that it is a departure from plan to transport and assemble in Europe complete American divisions, is made in view of exigencies of present military situation and is made in order to bring into useful co-operation at the earliest possible moment largest number of American personnel in the military armament needed by the Allies.

It being also understood that this statement is not to be regarded as a commitment from which Government of United States is not free to depart when exigencies no longer require it, and also that preferential transportation of infantry and machine-gun units here set forth as a policy and principle is not to be regarded as so exclusive as to prevent Government of United States from including in troops carried by its own tonnage from time to time relatively small numbers of personnel of other arms as may be deemed wise by United States as replacements and either to make possible use of maximum capacity of ships or most efficient use of infantry and machine-gun units as such transported or maintenance of sources of supply already organised and in process of construction for American Army already in France.

These suggestions are made in order that there may be a clear understanding of intention of United States and of mode of execution of that intention and they are not stipulated as indicating any intention on the part of the United States, until situation has in its judgment changed, to depart from its full compliance with recommendation of Permanent Military Representatives as nature of the case will permit.”

On the whole, this was a satisfactory arrangement. We should naturally have preferred a definite guarantee of the 120,000 infantry and machine-gunners a month which the President had agreed to, and have liked discretion to have been given to Foch or the Supreme War Council to decide when the emergency was past, instead of it being retained in America. But Reading advised us that these were quite the most favourable terms we could hope to obtain, and strongly urged their frank acceptance. So at a meeting of the War Cabinet on April 23rd, 1918, it was resolved to authorise Lord Reading to accept the memorandum, and to advise him that the War Office would take up the discussion of arrangements with General Pershing for carrying out its decisions.

But if we were satisfied, Pershing was raging with indignation. He crossed to London on April 21st, and on 22nd had an interview with Lord Milner and Sir Henry Wilson, who had now succeeded General Robertson as C.I.G.S. At this meeting he was told of the memorandum, which he had not yet seen, and at once declared that it could not be possible that any such concession had been made, and that the classes of our troops to be shipped over and their disposition must be left to him." He did not receive his official copy of the document until his return to France, where he found it waiting for him. His verdict upon it was:—

"This concession went further than it was necessary to go, and much further than I had expected. Realising the complications that might arise from commitments so far in the future and the delay in forming an American Army that would follow, I did not agree in later discussions at the Supreme War Council with all that the Allies now felt justified in demanding. . . . It need not be further emphasised that such a concession, even though prompted by the most generous impulse, could only add to the difficulties of our task of building up an army of our own."\*

Thus the decision of the President of the United States proved of sufficient value in face of the stubborn intransigence of the American Commander-in-Chief. He could see no further than the aggrandisement of his own command, the jealous maintenance of his own authority. It was President Wilson's first experience of just the same kind of professional egotism as we had frequently experienced in dealings with our own Army heads. Although he possessed autocratic powers on executive questions he could not secure obedience to his repeated behests from an officer who was his subordinate. Lincoln had encountered similar difficulties with McLellan. Where Presidents failed to control Generals it was not so easy for Prime Ministers, whose political position was precarious, to keep them in

\* "My Experiences in the World War," p. 361.



order. At the conference he held in London on April 22nd and 24th with Lord Milner, Pershing took upon himself the right to overrule the President's concession, and insisted on an arrangement whereby the shipments in May should not be confined to infantry and machine-gun units, but should also bring over the engineer and signal troops and various unit headquarters of six divisions—and, if there were shipping space available, the artillery of these divisions as well, and such personnel as might be required to build up corps organisations. Thereafter, instead of further combatant troops, Pershing required that shipments should convey such service of supply troops and other contingents as he might consider necessary. In fact, there was no assurance of concentration on the transport of combatant troops after the end of May.

On returning to France, Pershing was asked to go and meet Foch in Paris. Arriving there he found Foch, Weygand and Bliss. Foch took up the theme of the urgent necessity for the next three months of shipping over all the infantry and machine-gunners possible, leaving the other details of divisional formations to follow. But Pershing stood obstinately by his refusal to adopt this procedure. He would allow infantry to be brought over in May ahead of their divisional details, but the June shipments must be devoted to bringing across the corresponding artillery and auxiliary troops. All Foch's authority as Generalissimo of the Allied forces, and all his arguments based on the acute urgency of the crisis were powerless to stir Pershing from this position.

Needless to say, the change of plans caused bitter disappointment to our representatives in America, who had not only taken great pains to secure President Wilson's consent to the scheme for priority for infantry, but had proceeded to organise all the shipping arrangements for weeks ahead—as was of course essential—in accordance with this plan. By a ruthless cutting-down of other important shipping programmes, they had succeeded in rallying such a volume of tonnage that on April 30th they were able to put forward a programme for the conveyance of 700,000 American troops to Europe in May, June and July; 270,000 in American, and 430,000 in British ships.

At the meeting of the Supreme War Council, on May 1st and 2nd, 1918, the issue was again raised and discussed at considerable length. M. Clemenceau and General Foch were both very insistent that Pershing should agree to give priority to the bringing over of combatant troops. But he dug in his high heels and refused to make any concession. The most he would promise was to reconsider the matter later in the month. On the second day of the Council meeting I thrashed the matter out at length with him, and at last got him to agree to a resolution which set out that the arrangement he had already accepted in regard to May shipments—that priority should

given to the infantry and machine-gunners of six divisions, the rest of such shipping space as could be found being allocated to the transport of the other elements of their divisional formations—should be continued for June; and further, that if in addition to transporting the full personnel of six divisions (150,000 men) in June, we were unable to find tonnage for any more, this should be used for infantry and machine-gunners. The whole situation was to be reviewed afresh, early in June.

The clause about additional shipping was inserted at my insistence, because although in our desperate need for reinforcements we were doing far more to aid the transport of American troops than we had previously undertaken, and were thereby incurring grave risks at home, we felt the crisis to be so serious that we were determined, if thereby we could get more men over, to slash at every other shipping commitment, however urgent it might be.

The agreement was the best we could conclude with him, but it was far from satisfactory. On May 4th I cabled an account of it to Lord Reading. In the course of my telegram I said:—

“I am just as disappointed about the Pershing agreement as you are. The whole difficulty arises from the fact that the American Government has issued no definite instructions to General Pershing. It has agreed to certain general principles, but has left the settlement of all the practical questions on which the value of the agreement really depends to Pershing. . . . Despite all our efforts and the strong appeal by General Foch, we could not move Pershing beyond the point of six divisions in May and June. I may add that Foch, who is much the greatest Allied General, was intensely depressed and disgusted . . . and Bliss, who was present throughout the discussions, sat absolutely silent and gave no support to Pershing. I hear privately that he has expressed to his colleagues complete disagreement with Pershing's attitude.”

I went on to suggest that it would be very much better if some political authority from America were present who could deal with these issues, instead of leaving them to be settled by the General alone. If House had been present we should have got a better agreement. I described the actual situation regarding the fighting strength of the American Army, which was still persistently below the promised and expected level.

“It is maddening,” I wrote, “to think that though the men are here the issue of the War may be endangered because of the short-sightedness of one General and the failure of his Government to order him to carry out their undertakings.”

In my resentment at Pershing's refusal to carry out the arrangements made by his Government with their Allies or associates, I for

the moment overlooked the fact that the American Government was not the only one that failed to induce Generals to obey definite orders and carry out specific undertakings—even when they had been given with their consent. Pershing wanted to fight his own battle and win his own victories with his own Army. Haig wanted his own offensive on his own front, ending in his own break-through. Pétain wanted to make certain of beating the enemy on that part of the front for which he was responsible.

In my telegram I also pointed out that from the point of view of the American combatant troops themselves it was desirable that they should get some experience of the new and very intense form of warfare now being waged, under the care of Staffs experienced in handling the necessary operations, before they were placed in formations entirely run by Generals who had as yet no such practical experience. And I concluded by urging Lord Reading to make it his business, whatever the agreement, to see that as many men as possible were shipped across without delay, and as many as possible called up in the States in readiness for the autumn battles. Once large masses of combatant troops were in Europe, I was convinced that Pershing would see to it that the War was not lost by his refusal to let them be used where reinforcements were vitally needed.

In his reply, Lord Reading told me that the attitude in Washington was much more sympathetic to our demands than that displayed by Pershing. He would continue to get as many infantry as possible sent out, though in view of the partial surrender to Pershing there would be also considerable shipments of other types of troops. As a matter of fact, it soon became apparent that there would be a difficulty in maintaining a full flow of infantry that had passed through the preliminary five months' training for which General Pershing was stipulating. This rule had not been strictly observed hitherto, with the result that the troops shipped were of a very miscellaneous order so far as training was concerned. I gathered from a conversation in the latter part of April with Captain Guest, who had seen and spoken to American troops embarking from this country for France, that men had been sent forward from the United States without any method, with the result that men with six months' training were to be found side by side with raw recruits. General Pershing confirmed this information, and expressed surprise at the occurrence, which, he supposed, was due to the haste with which the orders to push forward troops had been carried out. He told us he had found it necessary to sift and reorganise these troops before they could be employed.

For this reason Pershing was now insisting strictly on the five months' preliminary training before troops were sent out from America. But as the number of recruits who had been so long in training was limited, it soon transpired that unless there was some



taxation of this rule, the flow of shipments, at the rate we were now achieving, would exhaust the supply. In a telegram to me on May 24th, Lord Reading said that on the present basis, if June shipments were maintained, there would be only a smaller number available in July, and none thereafter until September. Congress had now given the President power to call up as many men as could be equipped, trained and used, until the War was ended. So the potential supply was almost unlimited, but the numbers ready to be shipped were not. This was the result of the inexplicable delays of 17 months in raising, training and equipping troops. At the meeting of the Supreme War Council held on June 1st and 2nd, 1918, Pershing agreed to bring over troops which had completed three months' training, which enabled the rate of shipments to be maintained at its normal flow. Owing to the deterioration in the quality of the German troops, recruits with a few months' training were more valuable in the summer of 1918 than they would have been at any time from 1914 to that date.

At this Council meeting the vexed question of priority for infantry continued to be debated. The fresh German offensive against the French on the Soissons Front had just taken place, and the enemy had pressed up to Château-Thierry, seriously threatening Paris. The need for maintaining the strength of the Allies' combatant troops was more urgent than ever, and it was uncertain how long it would take to build up the American battalions now arriving into organised divisions capable of effective operation, whereas the empty cadres of British and French divisions, the infantry of which was exhausted, could take in these battalions immediately and utilise them while the crisis lasted. After long and heated argument, another compromise agreement was reached with the stubborn Pershing. This is set out in the following Memorandum:—

“The following recommendations are made on the assumption that at least 250,000 men can be transported in each of the months of June and July by the employment of combined British and American tonnage. We recommend:—

A. For the month of June: 1st, absolute priority shall be given to the transportation of 170,000 combatant troops (viz. six divisions without artillery, ammunition trains or supply trains, amounting to 126,000 men and 44,000 replacements for combat troops); 2nd, 25,400 men for the service of railways, of which 13,400 have been asked for by the French Minister of Transportation; 3rd, the balance to be troops of categories to be determined by the Commander-in-Chief, American Expeditionary Forces.

B. For the month of July: 1st, absolute priority for the shipment of 140,000 combatant troops of the nature defined above (four divisions minus artillery, etc., amounting to 84,000 men plus

56,000 replacements); 2nd, the balance of the 250,000 to consist of troops to be designated by the Commander-in-Chief, American Expeditionary Forces.

C. It is agreed that if available tonnage in either month allows of the transportation of a larger number of men than 250,000 the excess tonnage will be employed in the transportation of combat troops as defined above.

D. We recognise that the combatant troops to be dispatched in July may have to include troops which have had insufficient training, but we consider the present emergency is such as to justify a temporary and exceptional departure by the United States from sound principles of training, especially as a similar course is being followed by France and Great Britain.

FOCH, MILNER, PERSHING."

At the same meeting, MM. Clemenceau and Orlando and myself decided to send a telegram to President Wilson, expressing to him our warmest thanks for the great speeding-up of American reinforcements which he had authorised, and at the same time emphasising that the crisis still continued, and made even greater efforts necessary. We quoted the authority of General Foch for an estimate of the superiority at this stage of the German over the Allied forces on the Western Front, and his plea that the maximum possible number of infantry and machine-gunners should be shipped in June and July to avert disaster. We added that General Foch—

"represents that it is impossible to foresee ultimate victory in the War unless America is able to provide such an army as will enable the Allies ultimately to establish numerical superiority. He places the total American force required for this at no less than 100 divisions, and urges the continuous raising of fresh American levies, which in his opinion should not be less than 300,000 a month, with a view to establishing a total American force of 100 divisions at as early a date as this can possibly be done."

It may be noted that this estimate by General Foch proved in the event to be exaggerated. It was due very largely to the panicky atmosphere created by the German victories. The enemy strength was overrated. Since an American division, numbering upwards of 25,000 troops, was nearly three times as big as the German division at their then strength, 100 American divisions would have given the Allies very nearly a 50 per cent. superiority over the Germans on the Western Front, without counting the French and British forces; and since the corresponding corps troops, supply services and other auxiliary units attached to an American Army overseas would add another 15,000 in respect of each complete division, the United

ates would have had to raise and maintain in France an army of a million to fulfil Foch's request. In the event, the Allies established a considerable numerical superiority over the Germans long before the total American forces in France were approaching a third of this proposed figure. Pershing states that in the final hostilities between September 26th and November 11th, 1918, some 100 American divisions were engaged. Including replacement and depot divisions or parts of divisions, there were in November 41 American divisions in all in France. But the importance of the American contribution was far from being bounded by the actual number of troops that participated in the battle. Not only did the presence of over a score of his American divisions give to the Allied armies the numerical superiority needed to overpower the Germans; the fact that behind these there were another score of divisions in process of formation and training and yet other millions of men in America who could be brought over as need arose, enabled the French and British to fling their last reserves into the fight without hesitation or misgiving, and hammer ceaselessly at the German lines until they crumbled and broke. Most of the actual fighting throughout 1918 right up to the end, fell to the lot of the British and French troops and they sustained the heaviest casualties, but their sacrifices would have been in vain, had it not been for the part played by the American Army, notably in the last few months of this sanguinary campaign.

Conceivably the 100-division figure was put forward in the hope that by asking for 100 American divisions we might get at least 50. Hitherto the fulfilment had fallen far short of the promise where American troops were concerned. Pershing himself writes speaking of that big proposition:—

“We had fallen far short of the expectations of the preceding November, when I had asked Foch and Robertson to join me in an appeal for 24 trained American divisions by the following June. It is small wonder that the Allies were now so insistent in urging increased and continuous shipments of men, trained or untrained. . . .”\*

With the drawing-up of this programme, the long series of discussions and disputes regarding the number and nature of the American troops to be brought over to France may be regarded as having substantially come to an end. Thereafter, the steady flow of men across the Atlantic was based upon this schedule, and apart from temporary variations or difficulties, succeeded more or less in fulfilling it. The total ration strength of the American forces in France on November 1st was 1,868,000.

\* “My Experiences in the World War,” p. 446.



Of these forces, 51.25 per cent. were transported to France in British-owned or controlled vessels, 46.25 per cent. in American, and 2.5 per cent. in other vessels. Thus the principal share of the carrying and a large share in the convoying of the American Army was taken by the British Mercantile Marine and the British Navy.

When we come to the equipment of the American Army for the task, it is a lamentable story of indecision and bustling incompetency. The record of Britain's first ten months of blundering in the matter of equipment robs us of the right to point the finger of scorn at America's effort. But it must be remembered that when America entered into the struggle her industry was already largely organised for war by the immense Allied orders for war material of every kind which her industries had been executing for the Allies. In rifles, explosives, and artillery the work which had been turned out in American workshops ran into thousands of millions of dollars. In addition to that, they had at their disposal the experience acquired by the Allies in two and a half years of actual war. Allied officers were sent over to instruct the American War Office as to where the Allies had failed, and how they ultimately succeeded, what had been their difficulties and how they overcame them. Unfortunately, their advice was too often disregarded and somewhat discouraged.

It cannot be said that the Allied Commissions were altogether resented by the great industrial leaders who were charged with the duty of equipping the new American Army, but the impression was created of a sentiment that where mechanisation was concerned, America had nothing to learn from Europe. There was more than a lingering trace of the fixed idea that European methods were effete in industry as well as in government. "Europe" and "effete" were inseparable words in all popular American rhetoric at that date. As far as European workshops were concerned, certainly before the War, there was undoubtedly a great deal of justification for this conviction. So when we thought America might like to profit by the lessons we had learned in the trials of actual warfare, the American industrialists were inclined to regard our lectures as an invitation to them, who were masters of all the manufacturing arts, to take a post-graduate course at a dame's school. Hence they would have none of our aeroplanes nor of our cannon. They assumed on traditional principles the inferiority of these and they decided to have patterns of their own, which would demonstrate to antiquated European craftsmen what could be done by a nation which had demonstrated its supremacy in machinery. The world was to be impressed with the superiority of American workshops. No allowance was made for the practical consideration that finish and precision in every detail were essential to the weapons of war, and that for that reason, new patterns took a long time to evolve, to test and perfect. The serious delays that occurred in equipping the great

ny of men that America sent to Europe were largely attributable to this psychology.

All this would have been remedied, if there had been any real live at the head of affairs. It is only the man at the top who can give direction, impulse and inspiration to those who labour at the multifarious tasks of Government. It is only the man who wields authority who can accept responsibility for decisions which may involve an overriding of national pride and susceptibilities. It is alone who can supply the necessary push which saves valuable time and produces quick results. Languor at the top means inefficiency all round. Hesitancy at the top means vacillation and confusion of counsel and of action in every department of State. Procrastination at the top encourages sloth and slackness down below.

President Wilson was not cut out for a great War Minister. He knew nothing about war. Why should he? It was not his training, nor his temperament. He certainly had no delight in it. He shuddered at the thought of it. The turning-out of weapons for human slaughter not only did not interest him, it horrified him. When he was forced into declaring war, he could not adapt himself to the new conditions that were imposed upon him by this departure from the pursuits and inclinations of a lifetime. He had a stubborn mind and walked reluctantly along paths he disliked, however necessary he had discovered it to be that he should tread them. No push or drive for war could be expected from a temperament so antipathetic to all its exigencies. To ask him to turn his mind on to the manufacture of cannon and bombing machines was just as if you expected him to oversee the output of electric chairs because the execution of criminals was an integral part of good government.

This attitude on the part of the President marked the essential difference between him and Lincoln; between a man brought up and reared in academic circles whose instinct was to lead the nation to ideas of culture in an atmosphere of tranquillity, and the man who was reared and trained in hard surroundings where nature had to be fought at every step for every ounce of bread. Lincoln also tested war, and especially did he shrink from the fratricidal conflict which he had done his best to avert, but which circumstances he had failed to control had in the end forced him to wage. But there came the difference between him and his distinguished successor. Having reached the conclusion that the shedding of blood was the only alternative to the rupture of America, he threw the whole of his strong personality into the preparations for a successful termination of the struggle. With indomitable energy, he took steps to raise and train men to battle, and to manufacture adequate weapons to equip them for victory. It is one of the inexplicable paradoxes of history, that the greatest machine-producing nation on

earth failed to turn out the mechanism of war after 18 months of sweating and toiling and hustling. The men placed in charge of the organisation of the resources of the country for this purpose all seemed to hustle each other—but never the job.

Let us take the aeroplanes as an example. When America entered the War, the British and French aeroplanes were as efficient as any that hovered over the battlefields of Europe. In their production the experiences of the War had taught designers what defects needed remedying, and by this time most of the snags had been overcome. For some time, the Germans had acquired a fortuitous superiority through the ingenuity of a great Dutch inventor, but owing to the lucky mistake which landed a German Fokker machine behind the Allied lines, we had achieved a design comparable with the best German machines. There were no better pilots in any army than the daring and skilful aviators of the French and British Air Forces. American manufacturers would have been wise to start their enterprise by manufacturing to French and British designs. They could have gone on improving and perfecting as experience taught them wherever amendment and improvement were desirable or attainable, but unfortunately their untimely pride intervened. They considered that it would be a reflection on American inventiveness and ingenuity merely to keep to European patterns. They must have something original to send to Europe; something which would astonish the natives and drive the inferior German planes into the clouds to seek refuge from this new terror from the West. So the "Liberty" machine was projected, but refused to be invented. One machine after another was tried but each turned out to be as great a disappointment as its predecessor. When at last a new design had been achieved which seemed to be effective, and was ready for manufacture, General Pershing's Staff intervened with suggestions for further improvement. When these alterations had been made, instructions came from General Pershing for fresh alterations.\* The result was inevitable. No American aeroplanes were sent across the Atlantic during the whole of 1917. Even during the great battle of April, May and June, 1918, American aviators had to fly in French

\* "Reverting to the many changes recommended by General Pershing in his cables and reports from France, his custom was to appoint a board of officers to consider and determine for him the details concerning any foreign implement of war which he was told was necessary for the A.E.F. These boards were often a living exemplification of the old Army saying that 'a board is long, narrow, and wooden!' General Pershing himself knew nothing about airplanes, and so he approved and forwarded the report of a board which, from time to time, did not suggest a few changes in a standard type of airplane, previously recommended by it and him, for adoption and manufacture by the United States, but literally hundreds and hundreds of changes, including complete changes in the plane itself in favour of some other model. The wretched manufacturer at home would have to discard all his work and begin again on something else, only to find, later, that Pershing & Company had changed their collective mind again in favour of the first recommendation, since discarded, and the country and Congress were blaming the War Department for all these delays." (General Peyton C. March: "The Nation at War," p. 283.)



achines for they had none of their own. It was July, 1918, before the paragon was fully developed and then it turned out no better than, in fact not as good as, the thousands with which the British and French aviators had already won the command of the air before the "Liberty" machines had left the workshop or even the draughtsman's table.

When the Armistice was signed on November 11th, half the aeroplanes used by the American Army were of French and British make.

The same tale of fussy muddle can be repeated in the matter of guns, light and heavy, for the new American Army. The light and medium artillery used up to the end of the War by the American Army was supplied by the French. The heaviest artillery was furnished by the British. No field guns of American pattern or manufacture fired a shot in the War. The same thing applies to tanks. Here one would have thought that the nation who were the greatest manufacturers of automobiles in the world could have turned out tanks with the greatest facility and in the largest numbers, but not a single tank of American manufacture ever rolled into action in the War.

Transport was so defective that ships sometimes took a couple of months to turn round at the ports, and on land it was so badly organised that, in spite of help which was forthcoming from other armies, a large number of the American troops who fought so gallantly in the Argonne in the autumn of 1918 were without sufficient food to sustain them in their heroic struggle in a difficult terrain. The American soldiers were superb. That is a fact which is acknowledged, not only by their friends and British comrades, but by their enemies as well.

There were no braver or more fearless men in any army, but the organisation at home and behind the lines was not worthy of the reputation which American business men have deservedly won for honesty, promptitude and efficiency.

## STROKE AND COUNTER-STROKE

## 1. THE GERMAN SUMMER OFFENSIVE

By the middle of May the tremendous German assaults on the British line had been brought to a standstill without their achieving any of their objectives, cumulative or alternative. The British Army had been beaten back, but it had not been broken. At the end of the two battles it still presented an impenetrable front of resistance to its redoubtable assailant, and owing to reinforcement of men and material it was on the whole stronger than it was when the offensive began. The German onslaught had not succeeded in its efforts either to create a gap between the British and French Armies or to reach the Channel Ports, and it had completely failed to destroy our Army. Ludendorff's brilliant tactical triumphs had accomplished no strategic purpose. In fact, they weakened the German Army by the heavy casualties that it sustained and by considerably extending its front at a time when it had no reserves to spare. These failures ultimately proved fatal to Ludendorff's last chance of forcing a decisive battle before the Americans were ready to throw in a sufficient number of troops to convert an approximate equality in numbers into a definite and widening inferiority for the Germans. Time was on the Allied side. Two precious months had already been expended in vain attempts to compel a decision. The enormous reserves, which had been carefully and skilfully assembled in order to overwhelm the British Army before the French could come to its aid, had been largely dissipated. The German casualties were enormous, and the fresh divisions brought up from Russia since the 21st March were insufficient to fill the gap. Never again could Ludendorff mass so formidable a striking force.

The Reichstag Report on the offensive and its failure puts the position quite fairly:—

“ . . . Strategically the great offensive did not succeed. But the tactical results were extraordinarily large. The attackers had broken through the enemy positions in a few days to a depth of 60 kilometres—far deeper than the English and the French had ever advanced in massed battles lasting for months. The booty was immeasurable; 90,000 prisoners had been taken. The method

of attack had been brilliantly justified, and the troops too had fought magnificently. But the great tactical victory had involved a heavy sacrifice. Some 90 divisions altogether had had to be thrown in. That was the big shadow which fell across the victory.”\*

General von Kuhl, in his report to the Reichstag, speaking of the first offensive, said:—

“With every month the hostile superiority increased, while the reinforcements of the German Army became continually scarcer and were no longer adequate to make good even approximately our losses. . . .

Only a limited number of divisions could be adequately equipped for the attack, while the weak divisions holding the front stopped permanently in the line, without getting time for rest or training. Thus the troops were gradually getting used up, while the enemy was getting a substantial addition to his fighting strength through the arrival of the Americans and through the new fighting weapon of the tanks.”†

Our military advisers, in their computation of the relative strengths of the armies, always ignored the immense advantage which our undoubted mechanical superiority gave to us in fighting length. This amateurish insistence upon numerical rather than mechanical strength is surprising in a body of men who were supposed to be experts. But the Germans realised only too well its shattering effect upon their troops. Both the Reichstag Report and Ludendorff in his Memoirs dwell sadly upon the disastrous results of our superiority not merely in tanks but in guns, in ammunition and in aeroplanes.

But the German failure was not entirely attributable to these causes. There were other elements. It was undoubtedly the newly achieved unity of command on the Allied side which enabled the Allies for the first time to make the fullest use of all their resources of men and material. When the Germans found that Foch in his new capacity could treat the front as one, and from south to north bring fresh and vigorous French divisions to reinforce the British line—as happened in Flanders in April—or send British divisions from north to south to support the French if they were hard pressed, they realised that they were confronted with a novel factor which would profoundly influence the Allied strategy. There was an end to the condition of things which existed before the first offensive and which one of the German Generals had summarised when he said: “the French will not break their legs in their hurry to help

\* *Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918*, Vol. III, p. 137.  
† *ibid.*, pp. 188 and 189.



the British." That calculation had inspired their strategy. They could depend upon it no longer.

The Reichstag Report acknowledges the part which unity of command played in the German defeat:—

"The German attack had utterly smashed up the English Fifth Army. On the English side this was described as the biggest defeat which the English had suffered in their history. A wide gap appeared between the English and the French. Field-Marshal Haig made up his mind to withdraw in the direction of the sea. General Pétain thought above all about covering Paris. Preparations had already been put in hand for evacuating Paris, and calculations made about the embarking of the English Army. The separation of the English from the French was imminent. . . .

The phenomenon which appears in almost all coalition wars has been repeated: in a moment of acute danger, each of the Allies thinks of his own interests. For this cause it marked a turning-point in the War, that in this extremity the Entente was successful in setting up unity of command. . . .

The Entente has to thank General Foch for successfully subordinating the divergent interests of the Allies to a higher, united purpose, for closing the gaps and organising resistance to the separation of the English and the French."\*

The German Supreme Command still adhered to its conviction that their only hope of achieving victory was to defeat the British and drive them away from the Channel Ports. Ludendorff's memoranda show clearly that at this stage he was solely concerned to deal us such a blow as would make us willing to consider a peace without victory. The French people, fighting desperately on their own soil, were bound to continue the struggle as long as they could hold on and retain the support of their Allies, and their leaders were bent on recovering Alsace-Lorraine; but if Britain failed them the French would be compelled to consider terms. Ludendorff was quite clear that we were the backbone of the Entente and that no German victory was possible without our defeat. As he put it in a memorandum earlier in the year:—

"The insistent question is—how is it possible to defeat England in the field and exploit this blow to bring about a simultaneous collapse of the English war machine, even at home?"†

But before launching another attack on the British positions in the north, Ludendorff decided that his next stroke must be further south in order to draw away the Allied reserves from the north.

\* "Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918," Vol. III, p. 13.

† "The General Staff and Its Problems," Vol. II, p. 552.

At a council of war held between Ludendorff and the Chiefs of the General Staffs of the army groups of Crown Prince Rupprecht and of the German Crown Prince after the practical abandonment of the surprise attack, it was decided that the next stroke should be an attack on the French, on the Chemin des Dames sector. It was a quiet part of the front, and Ludendorff hoped by breaking through it to compel the French to withdraw his reserves from the north. The order issued by the Supreme Army Command on May 1st, 1918, stated that:—

“ This attack has for its aim to break up the present united front of the Entente opposite Crown Prince Rupprecht's Army Group, and therewith create a fresh possibility for a successful renewal of the offensive against the English.”\*

The great offensive against us was to follow as soon as possible after the diversion at the Chemin des Dames had achieved its purpose.

There was considerable discussion as to what part of the British front was to receive the ultimate blow. At first Ludendorff favoured the renewal of the attack on the Amiens Front, in the direction of Doullens, as the Flanders Front was too difficult and too strongly held. But after further discussion, the greater advantages to be reaped by an advance further north brought down the scales in favour of a fresh Flanders offensive when the weather improved. This next attack on the British line was to be postponed until the summer and reparations were made for it all through May and June.

Between the closing of the German attacks in Flanders at the end of April, and the renewal of their offensive on the Aisne on May 7th, both sides were busy licking their wounds. We were painfully conscious of our losses, and were straining every nerve to make them good, combing out recruits, calling up classes of older men, for the first time during this war sending men of the “ B ” class to fill up gaps in divisions holding the quieter parts of the line and, above all, making unparalleled efforts to bring across as many troops as possible from America, which alone offered an unexhausted reservoir of vigorous man-power. The flow from it had so far only just begun. What was achieved in these directions I have dealt with in other chapters. We also made immense efforts to strengthen our defences along the whole of our front. The output of barbed wire in this country increased from 800 tons to 1,100 or 1,200 tons a week. In addition, a large order was placed in the United States. This will give some indication of the strenuous efforts made to improvise new defences and improve the old. Still, the enemy had lost more heavily than we in the spring offensives, and his reserves of available men were more depleted than ours. Every available source had already been combed and recombined. On May 15th, a fresh order was issued

\* “ Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918,” Vol. III, p. 558.

that 30,000 men for the infantry were somehow to be extracted from the already much depleted personnel of the German Quartermaster General's Department, a similar number from the ranks of the signallers, field railways and motor transport. But there was small hope that the order could be carried out. General von Kuhl stated in his evidence before the Reichstag Commission:—

“The course of the fighting in the March offensive made it clear that our losses could not be made good by reinforcements. So in April certain regiments of mounted rifles were broken up; and in May, two divisions were placed at the disposal of the Army Group to be broken up and distributed between the other divisions. In spite of this, we were unable in April and May to fill up the gaps caused by the offensive on the Armentières Front, and to maintain our attacking divisions at full strength. The average field strength of the battalions, which at the end of February still amounted to 807 men, had sunk by the end of May to 692 men.”\*

One hears a good deal of the fog of war, and having taken an active part for years in the administrative direction of the greatest war in history, I can well understand what it means. Despite aeroplane crossing and re-crossing the lines, the endless observing and photographing of German positions and stations, and the watching of German movements; despite also an elaborate system of intelligence depending on spies and examination of prisoners and of deserters, the gaps in our information were incomprehensibly great. On re-perusing the reports that came up from day to day through the War Office from Headquarters in France and other sources, it is evident that we had no clear realisation in May of the extent to which the tremendous battles of March and April had crippled the German army and incapacitated them from organising any further offensives on a scale which even approximated to the magnitude of their attack in the spring. Whilst they were unable to patch up the rents torn in the ranks of their armies, we were under the impression that by withdrawing fresh divisions from Russia they were increasing their strength week by week, and that they would shortly be in a position to launch a greater attack than ever upon the Allied Front. French and English Staffs might differ as to whether the attack would be on the British or French lines, but they were in agreement as to the immensity of its scale. Haig reported to the C.I.G.S. that he anticipated in the near future an attack by about 80 divisions. Foch did not agree about the locality of the offensive. Sir Henry Wilson reported to the War Cabinet ten days later that “by the second week in June the Germans would have reached their maximum available force, and might attack with *at least* 100 divisions which would be

\* “Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918,” Vol. III, p. 20



larger force than that which took part in the offensive of 21st March." The events of June will show how completely these estimates and forebodings as to the German numbers were falsified, but at the time the Allied Staffs assumed that the German Army had a decisive numerical superiority greater than that which they possessed when they made their first attack in the spring. How came they to make that mistake?

I have already pointed out that common arithmetic does not seem to constitute a part of the training given at Staff Colleges. One illustration of this kind of miscalculation was the understatement of the numbers of the American Army which had already reached France. During the month of May alone 160,000 American troops reached France. Of these 60 to 70 per cent. were infantry and machine-gunners, the rest being field engineers, signallers and ambulances. Reckoning the infantry alone on the basis of a full German or British division, this would have been equal to a reinforcement of nearly 12 divisions. The mechanical support in artillery, aeroplanes and tanks could have been supplied by the French and British Armies. In the event of a serious emergency arising these men would have been available as infantry to help in holding the line. Territorials who had not had any more opportunity for training had been put in the trenches to hold the line in the winter of 1914 and the spring of 1915, and a mixed crowd of men who had received no training as infantry had helped to arrest the German advance on Amiens.

The way Headquarters in France constantly exaggerated the accession of German reinforcements, while they underestimated this swelling accession of strength from America and other sources can only be explained by a desire to create the impression that they were fighting an uphill battle against overwhelming enemy forces. There may have been a certain amount of policy on their part in pursuing this line because they were anxious to press the Government to comb out industries at home even more drastically. Ludendorff was adopting the same methods in his dealing with his Government with far greater justification, as the event will prove.

It was not only that the German reinforcements from home and from the East were insufficient to make up the losses, but also that the quality of these reinforcements was comparatively poor. The best men had already been brought from the Russian Front; what was left was the poorer material. The recruits combed by the Germans out of industry and agriculture were deficient in training and there was no time to fit them for the terrible task in front of them.

Despite their increasing weakness, or rather because of it, the Germans dared not let the initiative pass out of their hands. Unless they could score a decisive success before the autumn, they were doomed. And, as for the moment there was no hope of such success

on the strongly held British Front, they launched their diversion against the French on May 27th. They attacked on a front of 50 kilometres between Rheims and Soissons.

They achieved what proved for them another brilliant tactical victory which, just like the triumphs they had won on the British Front, turned out to be damaging to their chance of ultimate success. In contrast to the offensive of the 21st of March they depended not on numerical superiority at the point of attack but on surprise. There is the usual discrepancy between the reports given by the French on one hand and the Germans on the other as to the numbers engaged on both sides. The Germans assert that they attacked with inferior numbers. The French, on the other hand, assert that the attackers were much more numerous than the defenders. British official reports to the War Cabinet gave the number of German divisions as "uncertain" but it was clear in any case that the numerical superiority of the enemy was not sufficient to account for his rapid advance." By the third day of the battle only 16 German divisions had been identified. Between the French and ourselves the Allies had by then more divisions in that sector. Even the number of German divisions given by the French to explain their defeat falls a long way short of the anticipated 100 divisions which were expected to take part in the next German offensive.

At the time of the German thrust, four British divisions were recuperating in the "quiet" sector near Soissons after being knocked about in the spring battles, and although they were largely formed of fresh drafts, including many rather raw recruits, numbers of them gave a splendid account of themselves, hanging on to their position till their flank was uncovered through the French on their left retiring and still holding up stubbornly the shoulder of their line which guarded the west of Rheims. This is the report of the part played by the British divisions in the battle which was given to the War Cabinet by Sir Henry Wilson, who had had a conversation with General Hamilton-Gordon, who was in command of the corps:—

"General Hamilton-Gordon had three divisions of the IXth Corps in the front line on the 27th May: the 50th Division on the left, the 8th in the centre, and the 21st on the right, in the Berry-au-Bac area. The first news of an impending attack came on the night of the 25th-26th May from a deserter. The battle started with heavy gas shelling, especially of the back areas, followed by an intense bombardment for two and a half hours. The wire having been cut by trench mortars, the enemy attacked in the usual way with the assistance of tanks. The 50th Division was left 'in the air' by the retirement of the 22nd French Division on the left without warning to the 50th Division. The Germans were already in the town where the Commanding Officer of the 50th Division

was quartered when he received the first intimation that the French had fallen back. The Germans came through the gap left by the 22nd French Division, and got behind the 50th Division, which suffered severely. The German tanks were used mainly at the point of junction of the 50th and 8th Divisions, and succeeded in working along a valley and getting behind the 8th Division. The 21st Division made a very good fight, but, owing to what had happened to the 8th Division, it had to withdraw eventually behind the Aisne. The 25th Division, which was in reserve, was put, by order of the French Army Commander, into the second position, and was overrun by troops coming back. All four divisions suffered heavily. The faulty French lateral communications, and especially the failure of the 22nd French Division to warn the 50th British Division, were important factors in causing the retreat."

The British casualties were heavy—they were estimated at 10,000. The French were not warned of an impending attack by a concentration of troops behind the German lines. Nor was there any evidence of a contemplated offensive at that point. But like the 21st of March started by a violent but short bombardment of the French trenches without any preliminary registration, and the movements of the attacking force were concealed by a morning mist.

Apart from the element of surprise, the bewildering collapse of the French resistance was accounted for by the blunders of the General who was in command on that part of the front. Blind to the experience of the War, and deaf to the orders of Pétain, he insisted upon keeping the bulk of the troops massed in the forward positions, so that the intense artillery preparations with which the Germans prefaced their attack smashed the defenders to pulp, and few were left to resist. And by unduly delaying his orders for the destruction of the bridges over the Aisne, he suffered them to fall into the hands of the enemy, and thus made their advance easy. The centre of the attacked front gave in, and the Germans swept over the Chemin des Dames, down to the Aisne and across its unbroken bridges, and on to the Vesle, which they also crossed. During the first day they had advanced at the centre to a depth of 12 miles. This was far more than they had accomplished in a day, either in the St. Quentin battle of March or in their April attack in Flanders. It was in fact a startling and disconcerting success. The next two days they pressed onward right and left to widen their salient and reached the bank of the Marne. They were thus well on the way to Paris. In four days, Ludendorff had advanced over 30 miles, had taken 400 guns and nearly 40,000 prisoners. Ultimately in this battle they captured 55,000 prisoners, 50 guns and 2,000 machine-guns with vast stores of ammunition. The German losses were comparatively slight. As a feat of arms, it was magnificent. As a piece of strategy, it turned out to be suicidal.



This German victory and especially the ease and rapidity with which it was achieved had a depressing effect on the Allied morale. It was the third great battle in which the Germans in a few days had broken through the Allied line to a depth which the French and British offensives had never reached after weeks and months of laborious and costly effort. The prisoners and guns captured by the enemy in each of these battles exceeded the highest record of the Allies in any of their great offensives. The defeat of the 21st of March was capable of an explanation which was not derogatory to the powers of resistance of the British Army. Their defences were crude and imperfect and they were overpowered by an enemy who outnumbered the defenders by three to one. But in the May battle the defences were exceptionally strong and the numbers on both sides were approximately equal. There was another reason for the general sense of dejection caused by this defeat. When we were beaten in March the French were more than inclined to ascribe the disaster to bad leadership on the part of our Generals, which they thought accounted for a lack of fighting spirit in our soldiers. But when the French were at the first assault swept out of Kemmel—a position which for years had been well behind the British front line—doubts began to creep into minds which hitherto had been confident of the undiminished proficiency of the French Army. The heavy defeat sustained by the French on the Chemin des Dames and the Aisne and the poor fighting put up by their divisions, which enabled the enemy at one blow to advance within 40 miles of Paris, created for the time being a sense not only of despondency but of something tantamount to dismay. This was deepened by the nightly bombardment of Paris by enemy aeroplane. Another mysterious development caused a panic in the French metropolis. Huge shells, emanating from no one knew where, dropped on Paris. Buildings were shattered and hundreds were killed or maimed. One of these missiles dropped through the roof of a church where Mass was being celebrated, killing scores of the congregation. At first it was thought that a solitary aeroplane had flown over the city and dropped a bomb here and there. When it was discovered that the explosions were due to a gigantic gun which fired from a distance of 50 miles, there was consternation amongst all classes. Multitudes fled from Paris to safer environments.

Just at the moment of deepest gloom the Allies held a series of conferences at Versailles. We all knew that victory or defeat in a war between adversaries who were fairly matched would resolve itself ultimately into a question of morale. The strain of continuous fighting under conditions of terror unexampled in character and duration was bound sooner or later to break the nerves of the bravest men. Which of the two rival armies would be pushed first across the frontier of endurance? Victory would rest with the one that remained on the battlefield in howsoever exhausted a condition. In the spring of 1918

the French *poilu* was on the point of a complete nervous breakdown, but he was not so far gone that he could not be rallied to defend his trenches, and the Germans were not then in a position to press their temporary advantage. The Italian Army had a bad temporary collapse in the late autumn of 1917. Passchendaele had undoubtedly worn down the high spirit of the British Army. In the March and April 1918 fighting the Germans had overrun positions which in 1916 and 1917 would have been thought impregnable on either side. What about the French morale? Had it recovered enough of its old valiant ardour to face and repel the onset of masses of well-led veterans exhilarated by a succession of brilliant victories? Recent events had inspired doubts in men not ready victims to vague fears. When we assembled in the conference chamber at Versailles we could hear all day during our discussions the deep thud of the German guns at Château Thierry. In the evening the German aeroplanes flew over our heads and we heard the fierce crack of their bombs in the direction of Paris. The lakes in the gardens of Versailles were all camouflaged with a green cover of imitation grass so as to mislead hostile bombers. Lord Derby, who was then our Ambassador in France, reported to me that there was a wave of pessimism sweeping over Paris, and that there was special resentment felt against Foch, who had not realised extravagant expectations by immediately arresting the German advance after he had been placed in full control of the Allied Armies. In his opinion, unless there was an improvement in the situation and that soon, there would be an irresistible demand for a change in the Supreme Command. The only reason why Clemenceau did not share Foch's temporary unpopularity was the feeling that there was no one else to take his place. Probably there were no keen competitors for a position which in the circumstances had more risk than glamour attached to it. This report fairly represented the Parisian atmosphere. An important British official said to me during this conference: "This is the last occasion upon which we shall be able to hold our meetings at Versailles." If the French had so readily given up elaborate entrenchments when the Germans were advancing on their capital, what reason was there to expect that they would hold on to positions where there was no time to prepare adequate defences?

This general despondency came upon me with surprise. I did not anticipate it. I did not share it. I thought it quite unjustified. I was convinced we had got over the worst. I was confirmed in my impression by the attitude of Foch. He definitely did not share the prevalent pessimism. He was calmly preparing his great counter-attack and making ready for it. He was disappointed with the poor show made by the French divisions in the last battle and he was conscious of the fact that the defeat interfered with his plans for the counter-offensive and postponed its date. Nevertheless, the whole of his mind was concentrated on the building up of such reserves as

would not only enable him to beat off the enemy but to launch a counter-stroke that would hurl the Germans back and which would—once their retreat began—enable the Allied Armies to batter them without cease into a shapeless rout.

We had an entertaining demonstration of Foch's strategical plans during one of our adjournments for lunch. He and Mr. Balfour were out for a stroll in the garden. We could see them engaged in animated conversation, i.e. animated as far as General Foch was concerned. Mr. Balfour was evidently listening with deferential attention to the old soldier, interjecting an occasional question. We then saw the General standing in front of the statesman indulging in violent pugilistic gestures first with his fists and then with his feet. We discovered afterwards that he was illustrating the great plan of his counter-offensive. When it began, he would hit here and hit there—he would use not only his two arms but both his feet, hitting and kicking without cease so as to give the enemy no time to recover. It turned out to be a dramatic forecast of the method which the great soldier was soon to employ and which ended in complete victory for the Allies. Foch saw in this moment of apparently calamitous defeat that the Germans had helped his ultimate scheme by the apparent completeness of their victory. Once more it was for them a tactical triumph but a strategic calamity for the deep salient that resulted could not be held without devoting considerable forces to this task—forces intended to carry out the "Hagen" attack upon the British Front. It was too narrow a salient to form the base for a further advance unless it could be considerably widened; and that meant that yet more troops must be used up in thrusting sideways at the bastion of Rheims, which still held out to the east, and at the forest of Villers-Cotterets and Compiègne, which hemmed the new salient in on the west.

The German offensive was only partially successful in its purpose of drawing the Allied forces to the south and thus weakening the British Front. Foch was well aware that Prince Rupprecht's Army was still intact opposite us in Flanders. He brought reinforcements from the troops south of the Somme, and eventually as the battle progressed he ordered down the French Tenth Army, which had been in reserve behind our First and Third Armies in the north. But by this time it was evident that the Germans were too deeply committed across the Aisne to be able promptly to transfer their attack to the north while our forces there were rapidly regaining their strength. In the month from March 21st to April 20th, fresh drafts totalling nearly 200,000 had been sent by us to France, including, as a result of the emergency, the youths under 19. By June 1st the total British white forces, home and Dominion, in the B.E.F., France, were within 7,000 of their total of March 1st, and a month later they had passed it. Once again the Germans were in the position that they must draw the Allied reserves again to the south by a fresh attack there before the



ould hope for success with their "Hagen" attack in Flanders. And meanwhile they had extended the front they must hold in the south by the circumference of a deep and precarious salient.

The Germans were thus doubly committed to continue their offensive in the south—partly because the positions they now held were unsafe for defence unless the salient could be widened; partly because it was their only method of weakening the reserves in the north and making possible their long-planned Flanders offensive.

The Battle of the Aisne drew to a close on June 6th. Its last day was marked by a successful counter-attack by American troops, and another by the British. The fine performance of the Americans on June 6th was an omen of grim significance for the Germans and a revelation to the astonished Headquarters of their allies, who had been assured that nothing was to be apprehended from the American Army for another year.

Three days later, on June 9th, the Germans launched an attack on the Montdidier-Noyon sector. This, however, did not surprise the French, as Foch had anticipated that such an attempt would be made by a thrust on an adjoining sector to widen the German salient. The assault was held at its ends, but penetrated the French line to a depth of 6,000 yards in the middle. This, however, was insufficient to bring the enemy near to Compiègne, and a counter-attack by Foch on the 11th compelled Ludendorff to abandon his effort. A week later another attempt was made, this time against the eastern shoulder, by an assault to the east of Rheims. But it was on a small scale, and came to nothing. The German blows had lost their former vigour, while the French were recovering their confidence. Colonel Schwertfeger, in his evidence before the Reichstag Committee, said of this fighting:—

"Meantime, as a sequel to the offensives on the Chemin des Dames, the assault which we delivered on Compiègne had been started on the 9th June; but it had to be broken off on the 11th under the impact of a powerful French counter-offensive. The whole front from Montdidier to Rheims was placed on the defensive, and in the middle of June comparative quiet set in."\*

For nearly a month there were only local operations on the Western Front. The Allied forces staged various minor attacks for the purpose of improving their line at different points and harassing the enemy. One of these, which occurred on the British Front, caused grave annoyance to the American Commander-in-Chief. This was an attack on Hamel, in the Fourth Army area, which was carried out on July 4th by Australian troops. The 33rd American Division was training with the British forces on this sector, and the Australians and Americans,

\* "Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918," Vol. II, p. 191.  
VOL. II—2C\*

who had both come from far across the ocean to fight the battles of the old Continent from which their forefathers had sprung, seem to have struck up a warm friendship. I visited the American camp shortly after the battle, and had the privilege of reviewing the troops. As they swung past they appeared to me to be as fine a body of men as I have ever set eyes upon.

From one of the officers I heard an amusing account of what happened over the Hamel fight. When the attack to relieve the pressure on Amiens was projected, it was arranged that Australian and Americans should both take a part in the enterprise. The young Americans were overjoyed with the prospect of entering into their first battle in the World War. A message, however, came from American Headquarters, forbidding their use for the fight. The reasons given for this peremptory order were that they were there for training, and were not yet ready to be put into action.

When the Americans heard of this order a wave of disappointment spread over their camp, and some of them passed the sad news to their Australian comrades. The latter promptly scoffed at the idea that they should be diverted from their purpose merely because an order had come from Headquarters, and they told their American comrades: "You don't mean to say that you take any notice of those blighters—we never do."

The Americans agreed with this view, went into action, and by all accounts I heard they fought with great dash and spirit. The only comment of the Australians was: "They are fine fighters, only rather rough!"

General Pershing records in his book, "My Experiences in the World War," his extreme annoyance with the British Army Staff for allowing the American troops to fight contrary to his orders. He says that the immediate result of this incident "was to cause me to make the instructions so positive that nothing of the kind could occur again."\*

During this pause in the carrying out of major offensives, Ludendorff was engaged in reforming his damaged divisions with such material as he could scrape together. He was still counting on delivering that final blow in Flanders; but before he could do so he was under the necessity of widening his perilous salient on the Marne. On the 14th of June he ordered preparations to be put in hand for a double assault to be delivered on or about the 10th of July on both sides of Rheims, with a view to pinching out this cramping obstacle and straightening out the narrow salient. Presuming its success, the Hagen attack in Flanders was to follow ten days later.

Ludendorff further ordered that arrangements should be made following up these offensives, for a big thrust between the Somme and the Marne, to capture both Amiens and Paris. But here a protest

\* "My Experiences in the World War," p. 475.

rose in his General Staff that there would not be troops enough for so big a simultaneous thrust, and on July 12th, Ludendorff announced that they would have to wait till after the Marne and Flanders offensives to decide whether to make their next attack on Paris or on Amiens.

Events were to save them this trouble. Ludendorff was not the only person making plans during June and early July. Foch had no sooner got the Germans pegged down in their vulnerable salient than he started to prepare a counter-stroke. There were now large numbers of American troops in France—by the end of June there were already 4 complete divisions, of which ten were in the line—and reinforcements were hurrying across the Atlantic at the rate of a quarter of a million a month. The Allies had once more a numerical superiority and Foch was a firm believer in the attack. He was accumulating reserves for a great thrust in the direction of Soissons which would cut behind the German divisions occupying the Château Thierry salient. This was to be delivered as soon as the army of the Crown Prince was fully engaged in its projected attack to the east and west of Rheims. These reserves Foch jealously preserved for the great opportunity that he had known for months would arise after the Germans had exhausted their strength in unsuccessful offensives. It was an essential part of the plan of campaign he submitted to the Military Representatives of the Council and to Pétain and Haig in January. It will be recalled how these two eminent military leaders counted it as an impracticable proposition. When the rapid advance of the Germans to the Marne at the end of May seemed to threaten Paris, Pétain meant to draw upon these reserves to bar the German onrush, and had actually given orders that some of the divisions designed for the counter-offensive should move to the support of the French Armies who were barring the road to Paris. Foch however intervened and refused to allow them to be drawn away from their designated purpose. Pétain had to use such other troops as he could find to defend Champagne and the line of the Marne. The Reserve Army remained intact under cover of the woods, ready to pounce at the word of command from the Generalissimo.

Although the "Hagen" attack on Flanders was still pending, Foch rightly judged that it would not be delivered until after the further German assault on Rheims. In fact, nine of Prince Rupprecht's reserve divisions were brought down from the north for the new offensive against the French to the east of Rheims. Haig, who at first had been averse to dispatching any troops to Champagne, subsequently accepted Foch's view and agreed to the withdrawal of eight French divisions from the reserves behind his front. He also supplied four of his own British divisions to strengthen the attack on the German salient.

On July 15th the last German offensive of the War was launched,



east and west of Rheims. Foch was expecting it and was prepared to give up a certain amount of ground on both fronts. Pétain's tactics of the elastic front, lightly held in the forward zone which forced attackers to advance beyond the support of their trench mortars before they met the main body of the defence, muffled on this occasion the full force of the onset, which did not achieve any very spectacular gains during its first two days. On the third day, Foch struck. He had massed his army of attack under General Mangin, one of the most dashing Generals of the War, in the forest of Villers-Cotterets, on the west flank of the German salient, and thence they issued, with the first light of dawn, supported by a mass of tanks and with no preliminary bombardment. Mangin attacked with 22 divisions between the Marne and the Aisne, in an easterly direction, on a 50-kilometre front. Of these divisions, two were British, two were American and therefore twice the strength of the ordinary British or French division. The very existence of such a tremendous striking force on their western flank was skilfully concealed from the enemy; the first day the Allies penetrated to an extreme depth of ten kilometres, captured 16,000 prisoners and approximately 100 guns. The lateral communications between Soissons and Château Thierry, road and railway, were thus brought under fire of the Allied artillery. The two American divisions were in the forefront of this attack, and in this, the first big offensive operation in which they took part, they covered themselves with glory. The part played by the British divisions in this attack was also noteworthy and contributed largely to the victory.

The British divisions attached to Mangin's Army were the 15th and the 34th. At the opening of the battle they were held in reserve and were thrown in on the 23rd of July. On that and the following days they were fiercely engaged. A footnote in the published despatches of Marshal Haig notes in connection with this battle that:—

“The 17th French Division generously erected a monument to the 15th Division on the highest point of the Buzancy plateau, where was found the body of the Scottish soldier who had advanced the farthest in the attack of the 28th July.”\*

And Marshal Foch records in his Memoirs that during a resumption of the attack on August 1st, in conjunction with three French divisions:—

“The British 34th Division, supported by tanks, assaulted the heights of Grand-Rozoy, and in spite of furious resistance by the enemy, they carried the German position between Grand-Rozoy the Signal de Servenay and the village of Cramaille at the point

\* “Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches,” p. 256.

of the bayonet. Here they hung on in the face of numerous and powerful counter-attacks. This decisive action compelled the Germans to make a new withdrawal.”\*

It was an effective surprise. Ludendorff had already gone north to Tournai to supervise the preparations for the Hagen attack, to be met on his arrival with the news of the French break-through. Admittedly the Germans had received previous warning of the pending counter-offensive. But they had—quite correctly, as it happened—understood that Foch intended to launch it on or before the 14th of July, and when it did not come then, they supposed it had been abandoned.

The course of the battle for the first two days had lulled them into security as far as their western flank was concerned. A desperate battle was raging around the heights above Rheims and further along towards the east. The Germans assumed that Foch had been compelled to throw in his reserves to help the hard-pressed French Army in those sectors. During these two days hardly a shot was fired between Poissons and Château Thierry, and the German troops in the salient were deluded into the belief that the danger of an attack from that quarter had passed. To quote a brilliant German writer’s† description of the tranquil state of mind into which these troops had subsided:—

“ . . . Night and day they have heard the fire from the actions going on about the Marne and in front of Rheims . . . they hear of successes: that we are fighting south of the river and have made some advance in the wooded hills. Then, too, the rumour is started that the enemy is everywhere in retreat—that he is throwing all his reserves into the balance at Rheims and about the river, and has no thought of attacking hereabouts: then vigilance becomes slack . . . and the troops are lulled into a sense of false security—they feel almost as if they were in Rest-Quarters.

. . . But suddenly this idyll is broken in upon by a surprise attack. . . . It falls like lightning—striking through the morning mists. I have been informed that when it took place numbers of the fighting men had just gone out to the harvest fields.

. . . The attack was made with an advance-guard of many hundreds of tanks, and—apparently—with tanks of a new design, small, and capable of great mobility; these, having advanced, were able to establish themselves as cover for the machine-guns, and thus the picture gained is that after a minimum of time, the front line had been penetrated at numberless points and our men were simply fighting for their skins, while their rear was at the same time exposed to further fire from the enemy’s machine-guns. What actually took place at the time, and amid all this confusion, no one quite knows . . . but the troops became aware that they were

\* “Memoirs of Marshal Foch,” p. 422.

† Karl Rosner: “The King,” *passim*.

surrounded—and lost their heads . . . such a thing is catching. Wherever the enemy advanced, he outflanked the neighbouring sections still fighting, widening to either side the gaps he had already made in our line. Side by side, in an uninterrupted storm of attack, came French and Americans . . . and the situation became more and more serious.”

The French thrust gravely menaced the German forces in the Marne salient, and after some fierce fighting, Ludendorff was forced to withdraw from it to the line of the Vesle. Indeed, it was with the greatest difficulty that he managed to rescue the bulk of his troops congested in the salient, leaving behind 25,000 prisoners and large numbers of guns and other war material.

It is interesting to note that General von Kuhl, in summing up the story of the last German offensive and Foch's counter-stroke, attributed the German failure to the lack of surprise in their attack, combined with the unity of command achieved on the Allied side. He pointed out that:—

“Foch had brought down the French troops, about eight divisions, from the Flanders sector to the French Front. Admittedly Haig had his worries, because he knew of the reserves standing behind the Crown Prince Rupprecht's Army group. But for all that he had to give up four English divisions to the French Front and send four more to the neighbourhood of Amiens on the Somme. Foch was thereby enabled to move four French divisions from there to further on the right. These movements were completed in good time before the 15th. This showed clearly the importance of the unity of command which had been entrusted to General Foch. Without that it would hardly have been possible to unite the divergent interests of the English and the French.”\*

The victory of Villers-Cotterets had a much more far-reaching effect than the defeat of the Crown Prince's attempt to capture the mountain of Rheims. It was the turn of the tide. To quote Hindenburg:—

“Although the fighting in the Marne salient had saved us from the annihilation our enemy had intended, we could have no illusion about the far-reaching effects of this battle and our retreat.

From the purely military point of view it was of the greatest and most fateful importance that we had lost the initiative to the enemy and were at first not strong enough to recover it ourselves. We had been compelled to draw upon a large part of the reserves which we intended to use for the attack in Flanders. *This meant the end of our hopes of dealing our long-planned decisive blow at the English army.* The enemy High Command was thus relieved of the

\* “Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918,” Vol III, pp. 17 and 178.

† Von Hindenburg: “Out of My Life,” pp. 385 and 386.



influence which this threatened offensive had had on their dispositions. Moreover, the English Armies, thanks to the battle in the Marne salient, were relieved from the moral spell which we had woven about them for months. It was to be expected that resolute generalship on the part of the enemy would exploit this change in the situation, which they could not fail to realise, to the full extent of their available forces. Their prospects were very favourable, as, generally speaking, our defensive fronts were not strong and had to be held by troops which were not fully effective. Moreover these fronts had been considerably extended since the spring and were thus strategically more sensitive."

It is very interesting to note the impression made by the Americans upon the old Prussian veteran.

"Of course, it was to be assumed that the enemy also had suffered very heavily in the recent fighting. Between 15th July and 4th August, 74 hostile divisions, including 60 French, had been suffering losses while the English Armies had been practically spared for months. In these circumstances the steady arrival of American reinforcements must be particularly valuable for the enemy. Even if these reinforcements were not yet quite up to the level of modern requirements in a purely military sense, mere numerical superiority had a far greater effect at this stage when our units had suffered so heavily.

The effect of our failure on the country and our allies was even greater, judging by our first impressions. How many hopes, cherished during the last few months, had probably collapsed at one blow! How many calculations had been scattered to the winds!"

Ludendorff confirms the impression recorded by his Chief:—

"The attempt to make the nations of the Entente inclined to peace before the arrival of the American reinforcements by means of German victories had failed. The impetus of the Army had not sufficed to deal the enemy a decisive blow before the Americans were on the spot in considerable force. It was quite clear to me that our general situation had thus become very serious.

By the beginning of August we had suspended our attack and reverted to the defensive on the whole front."\*

Hindenburg and Ludendorff realised that this defeat was not the loss of a battle but of the War. It was the beginning of the end. Hence more to quote from Rosner's vivid and picturesque description of this battle—one of the great decisive battles of history—it was:—

"*The end . . . the dark, abysmal giant-maw, from facing which he (the Kaiser) has so persistently averted his eyes all this day, now suddenly confronts him. One single horror looms in*

\* Ludendorff: "My War Memories," p. 677.

sight: that of disbanded armies, hurrying homewards: then the terrible disillusionment of the masses, harried by privation . . . the Unchained Horror . . . the Red Ruin of millions now roused to fury—cheated of their hour of triumph . . . the hour for which they had so long been waiting.”\*

The German Army had exhausted its reserves. The losses were so heavy that ten divisions had to be broken up in order to use their infantry for others. What was left was no longer strong enough either in numbers or in quality to enable Ludendorff to renew the offensive at any part of the front. It turned out to be quite unequal to the task of defending its lines against the reinforced and reinvigorated armies of the Alliance. The Germans knew that the game was up. It is a tribute to the moral supremacy which their armies had imposed upon the Allies that, with the exception of Foch, none of the Allied Commanders or their Staffs seem to have realised the favourable actualities of the situation.

It is difficult to overestimate and it would be ungenerous and unjust to underestimate the part which the American Army played in this dramatic change in the fortunes of the Entente. They had eight divisions (the equivalent of 20 French divisions) in this fateful battle. These fought with reckless dash and courage and contributed substantially to the victory of the Marne salient. There were other divisions holding other parts of the Allied Front and several in reserve. New divisions were in course of formation from scores of thousands of men already landed in France; there were scores of thousands of men on the high seas and myriads training in America with millions in reserve. The Germans, whilst depreciating their efficiency in action owing to lack of training in officers and men, paid a warm tribute to their courage and fearlessness. They knew too well that material of that kind would improve by experience in actual fighting. The Germans had observed and suffered from the same process with the raw levies Britain flung so prodigally into the battlefields of France and Flanders. On the other hand there were no fresh sources of man-power that the exhausted armies of the Central Powers could draw upon. In such circumstances the moral effect on the combatants on both sides of such a reinforcement for one of them must necessarily determine the issue. Here were brave duellists who had been for a long time inflicting angry wounds upon each other from which their strength was gradually ebbing. One of them decides to fling the last remnants of his power at the other in a desperate effort to rush a decision before he drops. The other—equally drained of blood—is reinvigorated by a transfusion from the veins of a virile and vigorous youth who comes to his timely aid. The result was inevitable. From the date of this battle the spirit of

\* Karl Rosner: "The King," p. 215. . . .

the German Army sagged. There were units amongst them which fought with desperate valour up to the end and the tenacity of their resistance is proved by the terrible losses they inflicted on their British, French and American assailants. But after the Battle of Ypres the German Army as a whole never put up the fight to which their foes had been accustomed during four years of incessant combat. Even the bravest men do not fight as well when they know in their hearts that no effort or sacrifice on their part will prevent them from being beaten in the end. If, in addition to this depressing knowledge, they are tired and worn out by constant fighting, then the stoutest heart begins to fail.

Foch's counter-stroke of July 18th put a definite end to all prospect of any further great German offensives. It was the turn of the tide. On July 22nd, Rupprecht's Army group, opposite the British Front, was told that it must stand on the defensive, and give up its reserve divisions which had been prepared for the Hagen attack, partly to reinforce the German Crown Prince's Army group, partly to replace divisions in the line which were exhausted.

Most of the fighting since April had been done by the French Army. It needed some time to recuperate and to refill its depleted divisions before it was in a position to resume the offensive. But it was Foch's policy to give the Germans no time to recover from the blow they had sustained. Above all, he was insistent that no time should be given them to dig and wire new defences for the lines to which their advance in salients had carried them. The policy which he had so strongly expounded to Mr. Balfour at Versailles in June was now to be put into operation.

Ever since his appointment as supreme commander, Foch had been thinking of and planning for an Allied offensive campaign; mishaps and defeats postponed the execution of his plan, but never altered his resolve to see it through. It was the plan of campaign sketched by him in his celebrated Memorandum of the 1st of January, 1918, which was turned down temporarily by the opposition of the two commanders-in-Chief. As soon as he saw that his counter-attack at Arras-Cotterets had succeeded, he drew up a memorandum outlining his proposals, which he laid before the Allied commanders at a Council of War on July 24th. The photostat of this critically important document is before me as I write, and I reproduce as an illustration Foch's autographed covering letter to Haig, with which he closed his statement.

Foch's Memorandum started by pointing out that his counter-stroke had not only stopped the fifth German offensive but had turned it into defeat. This defeat must be exploited, not only in Champagne, but on a much wider scale. The Allies were now fully equal to the enemy in number of battalions and combatants, and held a superiority of reserves.



*Commandement en Chef  
des Armées Alliées*

*Etat Major General*

1<sup>re</sup> Section

3<sup>re</sup> Bureau

•2374

G. G. G. A. le 24 Juillet 1918

**PERSONNEL ET SECRET**

Le-Général F O C H

COMMANDANT EN CHEF LES ARMÉES ALLIÉES

à Monsieur le MARÉCHAL COMMANDANT EN CHEF  
LES ARMÉES BRITANNIQUES EN FRANCE.

Monsieur le Maréchal,

J'ai l'honneur de vous adresser le mémoire sur la situation militaire actuelle et les opérations prochaines à prévoir dont il vous a été donné connaissance à la réunion des Commandants en Chef du 24 Juillet et sur le programme duquel vous avez bien voulu, vous déclarer d'accord avec moi.

Je vous demande de vouloir bien me faire connaître sans retard les observations qu'après examen plus approfondi, ce programme aura pu vous suggérer.

Ci-joint également le questionnaire dont il vous a été donné lecture; il serait avantageux que les renseignements demandés me parviennent avant la prochaine conférence, à laquelle je me propose de vous demander de prendre part, dans un mois environ.

*Bien sincèrement à vous*  
*Foch*

Facsimile of letter from Marshal Foch, 24th of July, 1918.

"Moreover, all the information tallies in revealing to us an enemy reduced to having two armies: an army of occupation, sacrificed, without effectives, held for a long time in the line; and manœuvring in the rear of this fragile façade, an army of assault, upon which the German High Command lavishes all its attention, but which has already been badly knocked about."

The Allies also held an undoubted superiority in aeroplanes, tanks and artillery; the Americans, pouring in at the rate of 250,000 men a month, would steadily increase their preponderance; while the fact that the Germans had been stopped and defeated gave us now a moral superiority.

*"The time has come to abandon the general defensive attitude hitherto necessitated by numerical inferiority, and to go over to the offensive."*

In his Memorandum, Foch envisaged two stages for this offensive. The first was a series of attacks upon different important sectors of the front, swiftly executed one after the other, with such forces as the Allies for the moment could rally for the purpose, preparatory for a further stage when we should have secured a good position for manœuvre and the balance of strength had shifted still further in our favour.

For the initial stage, Foch proposed two series of operations. The former series was designed to free the lateral railway communications along the Allied Front, and consisted of three offensives:—

"(a) Freeing the Paris-Avicourt line in the Marne district. This constitutes the minimum result to be obtained from the present offensive.

(b) Freeing the Paris-Amiens line, by a joint action on the part of the British and French Armies.

(c) Freeing the Paris-Avicourt line in the Commercys district, by reducing the St. Mihiel salient—an operation to be prepared without delay and to be undertaken by the American Armies as soon as they have the necessary resources at their disposal."

The St. Mihiel operation, as he pointed out in a footnote, would enable the Allies to act on a large scale between Meuse and Moselle—"which may become necessary one day." Clearly Foch was not taking shortsighted views of the ultimate scope of his offensive.

The other series of these preliminary operations was an attack in the southern part of the Flanders Front, to free the mining districts of Bethune from enemy threats, and an attack further north in Flanders for finally removing the enemy from the region of Dunkirk and Calais.

"As has been said above, these actions are to be carried out at brief intervals, in such a way as to disturb the enemy in the movement of his reserves and to deprive him of the time necessary for reconstituting his units.

They must be heavily equipped with all the necessary resources so as to ensure unerring success.

Finally, they must at all costs use surprise. Recent operations prove that it constitutes an indispensable condition of success."

Foch could not so early lay down with precision a term within which this first stage of his offensive would be completed: but in his Memorandum he indicated that there was: —

"ground for anticipating an important offensive at the end of the summer or in the autumn of such a kind as to add to our advantages and to leave no respite to the enemy."

The scheme was not acceptable to the French and British Commanders-in-Chief. To quote a French military writer who was fully informed as to what occurred at the Conference\*: "This Memorandum by the scope and number of the attacks contemplated at once called forth objections from its audience. *Haig and Pétain plead the fatigue of their armies: Pershing the inexperience of his* Not one of the three Commanders-in-Chief frames a formal refusal; however, being convinced that events will be responsible for bringing the plan of the General-in-Chief of the Allied Armies back within the bounds of their own conceptions." Pétain, in particular, in a written reply forwarded on July 26th, states that the offensive directed at the St. Mihiel salient, together with that of the Armentières pocket, will constitute, in his opinion, *the offensive of importance* contemplated for the end of the summer or the beginning of the autumn and that it will exhaust "*in all probability the French resources for the year 1918, but for a useful and comprehensive result.*" This last sentence is ambiguous. Foch records in his Memoirs that at the Council of War on July 24th, both Haig and Pétain were greatly surprised at the ambitious nature and magnitude of Foch's plan and the number of operations it contemplated.

Even Foch did not in July foresee that we should be able to finish off the War in 1918, and he thought the concluding blow would have to be struck in the following year. So far as the military situation on the Western Front was concerned, that was probably the sound view. But our victories in the Balkans and Palestine, which drove Bulgaria and Turkey out of the War, and the shattering effect of our blockade upon the morale of Germany and Austria, were to combine with Foch's strategy in the West to bring about an earlier conclusion.

\* General René Tournès: "Histoire de la guerre mondiale," Vol. IV, p. 193.



## CHAPTER LXXXII (*continued*)

### STROKE AND COUNTER-STROKE

#### THE WILSON MEMORANDUM

THE British military view was communicated to the Cabinet by Sir Henry Wilson, first in a verbal report on the effect of the German feat, and subsequently in an "appreciation" of the situation dated July 25th.

First as to his Report to the Cabinet.

When on July 19th, a report of the German advance and of the complete success of Foch's counter-offensive had been given to the War Cabinet, I at once felt the significance of the event. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, however, was by no means so optimistic. He recognised that the sole object of the German offensive at Rheims had been to draw Allied reserves from the north and he quoted a telegram from Pétain's Headquarters confirming that opinion. Knowing Wilson's habit of putting himself in the place of the enemy and speaking from his standpoint, I asked him to furnish the Cabinet with an appreciation of the situation as viewed through German spectacles. He replied that the enemy might argue as follows:—

"I made an attack on a big front with a few divisions so as to draw down to Rheims the bulk of the French reserves. This I have done, and I am therefore not dissatisfied with the results. As regards the French counter-attack, I am pleased with it, and I am quite prepared to give up ground, provided at the same time I draw into action the Allied reserves, and I am prepared to fight a rearguard action and then attack further north when it suits me. Of course, I should not like it if I was liable to be cut off, but the Crown Prince's reserves should be sufficient to prevent any such success on the part of the enemy."

I was nevertheless convinced that we had reached a new and more promising stage in the progress of the campaign. For this reason I invited Sir Henry Wilson to prepare a thorough study of the military position for the enlightenment of the Cabinet as to the effect of the second victory of the Marne on the military situation. Before preparing it he wished to consult Sir Douglas Haig. He visited him at

his Headquarters on July 21st, to consult him as to his opinions on the military situation. As a result of this consultation, I received a remarkable document from him entitled "British Military Policy 1918-1919." In it he set out at length his appreciation of the military situation and outlook for the guidance of the British Government whose principle military adviser he now was. He gave us his estimate of the prospects of the Western Front, and of what could be achieved on the subsidiary fronts, and his advice as to the aims we should pursue, and the distribution of available forces we should adopt during the coming 12 months. He submitted his forecast of when we should be able to resume the offensive against the Germans, and an indication of what he thought we might hope to achieve against them. He had not only gone over to France and talked over the situation with the Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal Haig: he also knew Pétain's views about the possibilities of 1918; and the communication he had received from Pétain's Headquarters as to the effect of the battle at Rheims showed that this eminent French General had seen in that event no reason for any change of opinion. At Versailles, Wilson was moreover able to draw upon the information collected by the military experts stationed there, and in the War Office he had at his disposal all the military information which it was the business of the Staff to acquire from every field and through our highly efficient Secret Service. Bearing this in mind, one is driven to judge his Appreciation, in so far as it bears on the prospect on the Western Front, not as a mere personal opinion of a very clever but somewhat erratic officer, but as representing the sum of the military wisdom and foresight available to him either at the War Office, at the British G.H.Q. in France or at the French G.H.Q.

Judged from that standpoint, the document is an astounding production, and to read it now in retrospect leaves one gasping at its wild irrelevancies to the reality of the position. Alike in fact and forecast it was wrong, grotesquely wrong.

Although the C.I.G.S. had been in communication with Sir Douglas Haig and had visited him at his Headquarters and had interchanged opinions with him as to the military situation and prospect, Haig was contemptuous of the actual draftsmanship of Wilson's Memorandum; he disliked its verbiage and its rambling into far-fetched speculations in the Far East. But there is no doubt that it represented the British Commander's view of the outlook so far as the Western Front was concerned after the German defeat in July. The quotation I have given from General René Tournès' book bears out that interpretation of his attitude.

Wilson's Memorandum bears date July 25th. It was, therefore written *after* the last German offensive round Rheims of July 15th to 17th, and *after* Foch's great counter-attack of July 18th which smashed the German salient and compelled them to withdraw from

the Marne. The Germans had been so weakened by war wastage and so disheartened by their defeat in their Champagne offensive that they had been compelled to abandon all hope of carrying out further major offensives in the West, and were busy organising the whole front for defensive warfare. It was written when Austria was falling to pieces, when the Bulgarian Army was disintegrating, and the Turkish Army had been reduced to a ragged remnant.

Bearing these facts of the situation in mind, let us see what formation and advice our chief military adviser has to offer the Government as the result of his consultations with G.H.Q. Wilson's memorandum starts with a review of the outcome of the Champagne battle. He correctly notes that the German offensive has been neutralised, and that:—

"As the result of these operations the Germans may be said to have lost the initiative *in that particular* part of the field, and *the threat to Paris has been greatly lessened*. . . ."

Wilson then asserted that Prince Rupprecht, on the Flanders front, still had his reserves intact, and it remained to be seen whether that offensive would materialise at once, or be delayed a while, till the enemy had gathered and reconstituted as many divisions as possible after his reverse in the south. Indications obtained in the fighting showed that the German companies were in many cases under strength.

As a matter of fact, the Champagne reverse had done a great deal more. Ludendorff says of it:—†

"The serious weakening of the 18th Army and of the right wing of the 9th . . . had to be made good by reinforcements. These could only be drawn from the Army Group of Crown Prince Rupprecht. G.H.Q. therefore decided to abandon this (Flanders) offensive. The Rupprecht Army Group was to stand on the defensive and to surrender reserves to reinforce the 18th, 9th and 7th Armies. . . ."

In other words, the Champagne battle had for its immediate result that the long-projected Flanders offensive was abandoned, and since Rupprecht's reserves, instead of remaining intact, were used up in reinforcing the shattered armies further south.

Wilson's statement that the enemy formations were under strength is certainly not exaggerated. I have quoted in another chapter General von Kuhl's evidence as to the state of their battalion strength at this time, which shows that they were far weaker than Wilson

\* My italics.

† "My War Memoirs," Vol. II, p. 674.



estimated. The real combatant strength of the German battalion and companies at this time was less than half its proper figure. It is easy to understand, therefore, now that the Americans were pouring in on a great scale, and the Germans were utterly unable to keep up the combatant strength of their units, that the flow of the tide was strongly on the Allied side, and the battle front was set for victorious advance.

With these facts in mind, let us see how Wilson views the prospect for the remainder of the 1918 campaign.

He sums up all the alternative possibilities which he considers might eventuate under five heads. The most favourable he can imagine comes first, and the others are in descending order of calamity for the Allies. These five possibilities are:—

“ 1. The German offensive may be fought to a standstill before any strategical decision has been obtained, leaving the Allied Armies in effective touch with each other, holding a line from the North Sea to Switzerland, covering the Channel Ports and Paris.

2. The British Army may be forced to abandon the Channel Ports, either—

(a) As the result of a successful attack on the British Front or—

(b) In order to keep in touch with the French and American south of the Somme.

3. The enemy may capture Paris, or bring it under such effective fire as will deny the use of the railway communications through it and stop the working of the extensive munition works which are concentrated in its vicinity.

4. The enemy may effect the complete separation of the British and French Armies, the former being driven back to position covering the Channel Ports, the latter falling back to the south.

5. The enemy may effect a breach in the line on some part of the front east of Paris, cutting the French Army in two and entailing a return to the conditions of open warfare.”

It is worthy of note that an Allied advance does not figure at all as one of the possibilities! It is clear that the “moral spell” of which Hindenburg speaks had not yet been lifted from the mind of our high Commanders.

Wilson then goes on to discuss what would happen in the event of one or other of these possibilities being realised. Either of the last two would mean the decisive defeat of the French and serious loss to the British and Americans:—

"... Alternative (3) would probably have such serious political and industrial results as to cripple the French powers of resistance. But, even should the French be compelled to make peace, the British Empire and America could still carry on effective maritime and economic war, though the withdrawal of their troops from France would be a delicate matter and might entail considerable sacrifices. Our military effort would then have to be exerted on the Eastern Front as well as in Mesopotamia and Palestine. The results to be obtained by this would almost entirely depend on the extent to which Allied intervention through Siberia had previously materialised.

... In the case of alternative (2), i.e., the loss of the Channel Ports, the Allies could still continue operations in France though at a great disadvantage owing to the unfavourable naval situation thereby created. Our position would be prejudiced not only by the insecurity of our cross-Channel communications and the practical cessation of traffic to the Port of London, but by the adverse effect on the submarine situation in the Atlantic, which would probably reduce to a considerable extent the forces that America would maintain in France. So much so that there would probably be a substantial surplus of American troops over and above what could be transported to or maintained in France which could then be profitably employed on the Far Eastern Front, provided the latter had been reconstituted."

Americans will be interested to learn that it was contemplated July, 1918, that their troops, if they were cut off by disaster from France, should be transported to the Far East to safeguard the Siberian Front. This is probably one of the flights of Wilsonian fancy which Haig characterised in his Diary as nonsense. On the whole, however, Wilson prefers to assume that the first alternative may be realised, and that: —

"... If the German advance is stayed without achieving any far-reaching strategical results, the immediate preoccupation of the Allies must be to secure such a margin of safety for our line in France as will remove all anxiety as to our position. This will enable us to devote our efforts uninterruptedly during the ensuing period to preparation for the decisive phase and, if necessary, to detach troops to other theatres without misgivings."

In this, the most favourable event, the utmost he hopes might be achieved in 1918 is a series of small local actions to improve our line by pushing the Germans rather further from the Channel Ports, the Guay coal mines, Amiens and Paris. That would require "the active co-operation of every man and gun that we can keep in the

field until late in the autumn." In that event there could, of course be no question of reinforcing any other front, with a view to launching offensives outside France.

Having thus in his vision led us safely through to the autumn with at least a chance of escaping one of the four disasters sketched in his possibilities (2) to (5), Wilson proceeds in the second part of his Memorandum to discuss the "period of preparation" which he presumes will supervene.

His hopes run high for a culminating military effort by the Allies. As to this, he asks: —

"The first question that arises is—when is this decisive effort to be made? That is to say, will it be possible to accomplish it in 1919, or must we wait until 1920?"

He proceeds to consider how the comparative man-power of the Allies and the enemy will stand. Assuming that the Germans are already 200,000 under strength, that they do not enlist large numbers of Russians in their forces, and that the Americans keep their promises, he hopes that the present Allied inferiority of numbers (which he puts at 30,000 rifles) may have changed by July, 1919, to a superiority of 400,000 or more. He accordingly concludes that it will be possible for the Allies to take the offensive in *July, 1919*. He considers the case for postponing such an effort until 1920, but turns it down on the grounds that Britain is war-weary, France and Italy are exhausted, and America is impatient. He is afraid that there may even be some difficulty in lasting out until his chosen date because "All enthusiasm for the war is dead," and to defer it longer would give the Germans time to exploit Russia. So he writes: —

"I have no hesitation in saying, therefore, that as a basis of calculation, we should fix the culminating period for our supreme military effort on the Western Front not later than 1st July, 1919.

As for what it may be possible to achieve by that offensive, he cautiously says that then our numerical superiority—

"if properly supported by the fullest equipment of every mechanical auxiliary, and efficiently directed under one supreme command will give us a fair chance of achieving substantial military success."

I see that when this document came before me in July, 1918, I made a note in the margin against that statement: —

"What does this mean?"

On reading the Memorandum to-day I still wonder.



I see, too, that against his statement that the Allies were at this time inferior in numbers by some 30,000 rifles, I wrote the comment:—

“(?) Don't believe it. Based on some old fallacious assumptions that German divisions full up.”

At this time the Allies had secured a definite numerical superiority owing to the arrival of the Americans. But our High Command had swung over from the reckless optimism of the autumn of 1917, when exaggerated the losses and weakness of the enemy, to an equally mistaken pessimism, which made them exaggerate the enemy strength. Having postponed the Allied offensive until July, 1919, Wilson proceeds pertinently to observe that the enemy in the meantime may be doing something, and asks what we can do to counter them.

He says that “*during this period the Germans need have no immediate anxiety as to their military position in France, although they will have lost their numerical superiority, and they can if they desire detach considerable forces for operations in other theatres.*” He then rambles into the most amazing fantasies. No one who knows Haig would hold him responsible for these vaticinations. They are purely Wilsonian.

He estimates that the Germans can concentrate 14 divisions a month on the Italian Front, up to a maximum of 93 divisions. They could also send 12 divisions to the Salonika Front. It would be less easy for them to dispatch considerable reinforcements to the Palestine and Mesopotamia Fronts, but they might establish a force at Baku and command the Trans-Caspian railway up to the borders of Afghanistan, thus threatening the North-West Frontier of India.

All these adventures in distant lands were to be undertaken by a country which could no longer find enough men to maintain an army for the defence of its own frontiers. Wilson's recommendations are framed to cover these fantastic nightmares. During the autumn and winter of 1918 he thinks we should send a number of our divisions to winter on the Italian Front, in readiness to repel the probable German assault upon it; and for this purpose, we should improve the railway connections between France and Italy. An attack at Salonika is somewhat less probable, but he thinks our situation there very weak, and contemplates that we may be forced to abandon the port of Salonika with heavy loss. He debates the possibility of an offensive there by the Allies in the spring of 1919, but his conclusion is:—

“On the whole, I am averse to undertaking an offensive at present in the Balkans, and recommend that we economise British troops to the utmost in this theatre by the gradual substitution of

Indian units as fast as they can be made available. The troops thus released will want a considerable period in which to recuperate and recover from the effects of their long sojourn in that fever-stricken district before they are fit for the arduous demands of the coming campaign in France."

The note betrays no realisation of the powerful reinforcements which the Allies had on this front through the addition of the Greek Army; no hint of a suspicion that it would be on this front that the Allies would within two months score the first of their final triumphs, defeating the Bulgarians in a fashion that drove them out of the War and compelled Ludendorff to appeal for an armistice.

As for the Palestine Front, where eventually the second of those final victories was to be scored, Wilson bases upon reports received from Allenby the conclusion that the furthest advance to be expected there would be to the line Tiberias-Acre, and that this would be of little strategical importance. If the Germans reinforced the Turks in the spring of 1919 on the Palestine Front we should have to waste reinforcements there which would be wanted in France. How the Germans with a grave inferiority on the Western Front would be able to spare some of their attenuated forces for Palestine, he did not explain. Anyhow, he thought the strategic importance of Aleppo even if we took it, was much smaller now, since the enemy could advance through the Caucasus against Persia and India!

This brought him to the one field where he thought significant operations should be undertaken in the winter of 1918-1919—Mesopotamia! True to the old Army obsession with the North-West Frontier of India, Wilson had visions of the Germans working their way past the Caspian, exploiting Persia and traversing Afghanistan to work their wicked will in India. Not in the remote future, but in 1919! Accordingly, here he saw prospects of a British offensive; and, characteristically, here also he was prepared to admit our superiority in numbers—a superiority so considerable as to be excessive. It is noteworthy how steadily the Staff view as to our inferiority or superiority varied with their desire to launch or continue an offensive, or their disinclination for a proposed operation. In Mesopotamia, Wilson declared:—

"Our military situation gives no grounds for anxiety as regards direct attack in the immediate future, for we have a large superiority in strength over the Turkish forces in that theatre, in fact, too large to be strategically sound, viz.: 73,000 rifles or 115,000 combatants."

So he recommended a thrust up into Northern Persia, giving a belt across to the Caspian, which would stop the Germans from

ancing on India. This was the one operation on any front except the Western which Wilson advised as desirable between July, 1918, and the following summer.

The third part of the report deals with the great battle of July, 1919, which was to be the supreme Allied effort. Clearly it was too late to lay the tactical plans for it, so Wilson confines his proposals to schemes for cutting down our divisions during the winter to a number we can maintain at full strength, increasing their equipment in artillery, machine-guns and tanks—this last at the expense of the cavalry—and bringing back as many British troops as possible to Europe from the “out-theatres.” All the white troops in Salonika and the 54th Division in Palestine, he proposes, shall be thus brought back. As we have seen, the victory he hoped for as a result of all this was very vaguely defined.

In the final section of the Memorandum, the C.I.G.S. stretches his legs for a survey of the situation of the British Empire after the war.

He expresses no opinion whether we should return her colonies to Germany, but is definite that we must maintain our railheads in Palestine and Mesopotamia; and we must hold a railway line from Baghdad to the Caspian. In consequence:—

“The end of the War will leave us with a much more formidable enemy on our distant marches than we had to encounter before, and it will tax our resources to the utmost to preserve our frontiers inviolate.”

Wilson cannot get his mind away from the Khyber Pass. He turns us:—

“We have to remember that in the next war we may be fighting Germany alone and unaided, while she will have Turkey and perhaps part of Russia, if not on her side, at least under her thumb. In such circumstances Germany, with no preoccupation in Europe, could concentrate great armies against Egypt or India by her overland routes, which are beyond the reach of our sea power.”

I have every reason to believe that Haig's mind did not accompany that of Wilson in his Far Eastern flights. But there is ample evidence that the C.I.G.S.'s estimate of the prospects of an Allied victory in France during 1918 coincided with those expressed by the two Commanders-in-Chief, Pétain and Haig.

There can be no better illustration of the difficulty of weighing the various factors that go to the making of a reliable estimate of the military prospects in a great war. At a moment when the German



offensives in the West had finally collapsed, when we had secured a superiority of Allied man-power and recovered the initiative in operations, when the Bulgarians could hardly be held in their trenches before Salonika, and the Turks were melting away in Palestine, when the Austrians had been repulsed on the Piave and their people were clamouring for bread and peace, our principal military advisers had come to the conclusion that the best prospect in front of the Allies was security on the Western Front for the rest of 1918, and a probable though not a certain victory in 1919.

That this extraordinary and pessimistic document from the pen of General Wilson did in fact faithfully represent the outlook of military leaders at that time finds striking corroboration from no less an authority than General Smuts. Smuts also had paid visits at various times to France, including one in mid-July, 1918, and had gathered an impression as to the military outlook from his consultations with Haig and his Staff. At a discussion in the War Cabinet on August 14th, he poured out the doubts and fears with which he had been filled from this source. Mr. Balfour had been expounding our war aims, and General Smuts felt constrained by the gloomy estimates imparted to him to sound a note of warning—all the more remarkable when we remember that this was after the successful blow of August 8th which Ludendorff described as the black day of the German Army, on which they suffered a defeat which robbed him of his last hope of maintaining a successful resistance to the Allied forces. On the heels of that victory, General Smuts, in making some observations on Mr. Balfour's Memorandum on War Aims, communicated his views as to the military situation at the end of August:—

“ Mr. Balfour had stated our peace aims from the Foreign Office point of view and on the assumption of the complete defeat of the enemy. He [Smuts] could not see that the programme based on that assumption was justified by the present military situation. He did not suppose that anything would happen materially to affect that situation during the present year. . . . He feared that the enemy, giving ground slowly in the West, would concentrate a considerable effort, mainly carried out by Turkish troops, in the East. . . . What he feared was the campaign of 1919 ending inconclusively in the West and leaving our whole position in the East damaged and in danger. He was very loth to look forward to 1920. Undoubtedly, Germany would be lost if the War continued long enough. But was that worth while? . . . ”

It reproduces the very tones of General Wilson's Memorandum and obviously drew its inspiration from the same source. What gloomy infection must have permeated our G.H.Q. to have an effect

h as this upon a clever and courageous thinker like General  
uts! And how fortunate it was that the Government did not  
e too seriously the opinions and advice tendered to it by its  
itary experts! Had we really believed their morbid prognostica-  
ns at that time, we might well have felt bound, in the interests  
the country, to bring the War to a hasty and abortive end rather  
n prolong the devastation and suffering by a continuance of it,  
gging on into 1920.

The judgment of the High Commands on military prospects was  
er reliable. Our military leaders swung from the extreme of  
imism to the opposite extreme of pessimism. Neither of those two  
ods had any justification in the actualities of the situation. In  
7 Haig was convinced, that even if Russia withdrew from the  
iance, if France had not completely recovered and the Americans  
re too untrained to fight, the British Army alone under his com-  
nd could beat the Germans in 1918. A few weeks after this  
liant forecast he plunged into a mood of inert and sulky gloom.  
fre and Foch were always optimistic, often without reason. On  
e other hand, Pétain was invariably timid and inclined to dejection.  
hat power is there so absolute as that of the Commander of a great  
ny? Great power is like alcohol. It exhilarates most men beyond  
e bounds of reality. In others it has the effect of depressing their  
rits. But in all cases it poisons judgment.

## CHAPTER LXXXII (*continued*)

### STROKE AND COUNTER-STROKE

#### 3. THE GERMAN RETREAT

As the British Army had on the whole enjoyed a quiet time for the better part of three months and had during that period repaired its losses and actually strengthened its equipment, Foch decided that it was their turn to make the next attack on the German position. There were two or three alternative suggestions. Foch at first proposed that Haig should begin with the long-planned operation in Southern Flanders to free the area in front of the Bethune coal mine. But Haig had by this time abandoned his passion for a Flanders offensive and favoured Amiens as the best starting point for victory. Rawlinson had been urging that the prospects of a successful attack by his army in this area were excellent. In this Foch concurred. Haig's first idea was to attack on a front of eight miles. He was now a convert to the Pétain strategy expounded by Sir Henry Wilson with appreciation as "a series of operations with limited objectives designed to push the Germans back." Foch demurred to this proposal and advised an attack on a much wider front. It was to be one of a series of hammer strokes designed to smash up the German Army. When Haig objected that he could not muster the necessary reserves for an offensive on such a scale, Foch asked him whether there were no troops actually occupying the trenches to the right and left of his proposed front of attack. Haig thus brought into his scheme of the offensive the British divisions on the left, and the French Army to the immediate right was also placed under Haig's command for the assault. The Generalissimo had by this time come to the conclusion that the German Army was no longer in a condition to resist any resolute attack made upon it by the now victorious Allies. The last defeat had wasted some of their best divisions and the heart had been taken out of the rest by the feeling which had spread throughout the German Army that victory was no longer within its reach.

Of the five major operations which Foch proposed in his memorandum for the first stage of his 1918 offensive, the first, in Champagne, was already in progress, and the second, on the Amiens Front, was thus agreed with Haig. Its details were fixed at a conference which Foch held on July 26th with Haig and Rawlinson and the French General Debeney, commanding the French First Army.



which was to co-operate in the offensive. Foch followed up this discussion by sending Haig, on July 28th, two memoranda, one containing instructions for the operation, the other putting Haig in command over both the British and the French forces taking part in the contemplated attack, and asking him to expedite the attack for as early a date as possible.

The result of this offensive completely justified Foch's insight into the state of the German troops. Once more the Allies benefited by the new method of attack first attempted but bungled at Cambrai—a short bombardment followed by the advance of a large force of tanks. Foch had employed these tactics in his Villers-Cotterets attack. The most secrecy was observed in the preparations for the Amiens offensive, and when on August 8th it was launched, it took the Germans completely unawares. Six to eight miles of ground were won by the evening of the first day. The French extended the attack to the south, and two days later they recaptured Montdidier. In a week's fighting, 30,000 prisoners were taken—the British Fourth Army took 21,000 prisoners at a cost of only 20,000 casualties. German reinforcements were hurried up. Had Haig flung his army into the gap created and pursued the broken and demoralised Germans without respite an even greater victory was within his grasp. When the enemy was scattered and unnerved, and their reserves were not yet up, Haig did not press forward with relentless drive and the Germans were given time to recover and reform their lines. Both Hindenburg and Ludendorff dwell with gratitude and surprise on this welcome respite. Hindenburg writes of Haig's tactics:—

“ . . . As luck would have it he did not realise the scale of his initial tactical success. He did not thrust forward to the Somme this day, although we should not have been able to put any troops worth mentioning in his way.

A relatively quiet afternoon and an even more quiet night followed the fateful morning of 8th August. During these hours our first reinforcements were on their way.”\*

Ludendorff says:—

“ The situation was uncommonly serious. If the enemy continued to attack with even ordinary vigour, we should no longer be able to maintain ourselves west of the Somme.”

He had made preparations for a further considerable retirement, but, as he puts it, the enemy attack on the 9th “ fortunately for us, was not pressed with sufficient vigour.”† The fact of the matter was

Von Hindenburg: “ Out of My Life,” p. 393.  
Ludendorff: “ My War Memories, 1914-18,” p. 682.

that the British Army itself did not realise the extent and effect of the triumph they had won that day. They were thinking in the terms of past offensives when a gain of a few kilometres in an attack was as much as they could hope to accomplish, and experience had taught them the dangers of advancing too far because the Germans invariably rallied, brought up their reserves and counter-attacked with verve and skill. They had not yet understood that they were confronted to-day with an enemy who had lost much of his dash and combative strength. The reports of the battle received by the Cabinet from the front showed how little even the victors understood the immense effect of the triumph they had won. The actual ground captured was not extensive. The effect of the victory was moral and not territorial. It revealed to friend and foe alike the breakdown of the German power of resistance. More finally even than by the French counter-offensive of July 18th were the Germans driven by the British stroke of August 8th to realise that all hope of victory had passed. After the July defeat, whilst they came to the conclusion that their offensive had finally failed they still hoped to reorganise their army effectively for an impenetrable defence. After the Amiens battle even this seemed impossible. Ludendorff admitted that:—

“The 8th August demonstrated the collapse of our fighting strength, and in the light of our recruiting situation it took from me any hope of discovering some strategic measure which would re-establish the position in our favour. . . . An end must be put to the War.”

And he published startling incidents during this fight which were responsible for the gloomy conclusion at which he arrived:—

“The report of the Staff Officer I had sent to the battlefield as to the condition of those divisions which had met the first shock of the attack on the 8th perturbed me deeply. I summoned divisional commanders and officers from the line to Avesnes to discuss events with them in detail. I was told of deeds of glorious valour but also of behaviour which, I openly confess, I should not have thought possible in the German Army; whole bodies of our men had surrendered to single troopers, or isolated squadrons. Retiring troops, meeting a fresh division going bravely into action, had shouted out things like ‘Blackleg,’ and ‘You’re prolonging the War,’ expressions that were to be heard again later. The officers in many places had lost their influence and allowed themselves to be swept along with the rest. At a meeting of Prince Max’s War Cabinet in October, Secretary Scheidemann called my attention to a Divisional Report on the occurrences of 8th August which

contained similar unhappy stories. I was not acquainted with this report, but was able to verify it from my own knowledge. A battalion commander from the front, who came out with a draft from home shortly before 8th August, attributed this to the spirit of insubordination and the atmosphere which the men brought back with them from home. Everything I had feared, and of which I had so often given warning, had here, in one place, become a reality. Our war machine was no longer efficient. Our fighting power had suffered, even though the great majority of divisions still fought heroically.

The 8th August put the decline of that fighting power beyond all doubt and in such a situation as regards reserves, I had no hope of finding a strategic expedient whereby to turn the situation to our advantage. On the contrary, I became convinced that we were now without that safe foundation for the plans of G.H.Q. on which I had hitherto been able to build, at least so far as this is possible in war. Leadership now assumed, as I then stated, the character of an irresponsible game of chance, a thing I have always considered fatal. The fate of the German people was for me too high a stake. The War must be ended.”\*

The Kaiser reached the same conclusion. In a conversation at Compiègne on August 8th, whilst the battle was in progress, he declared:

“I see that we must strike the balance. We are at the limits of our endurance. The War must be brought to an end.”†

Thereafter the German High Command devoted itself to the attempt to fight a rearguard action in the hope that they could drag out the conflict until the Allies would be sufficiently weary of it to agree to terms which would not be too disastrous for the Central Powers.

The Reichstag Committee of Enquiry, after reviewing the full evidence, came to the conclusion that: —

“Up to 15th July, 1918, the Supreme Army Command rejected the view that victory was no longer possible of attainment by force of arms, and gave no support to peace negotiations upon the basis of a military stalemate. . . .

The collapse of the whole offensive, which became evident after the defeat of 8th August, is explained by the fact that as a result of continuous fighting of incredible severity, the bodily and mental capacity for endurance of the troops had become exhausted, and

Ludendorff: “My War Memories, 1914-18,” pp. 683 and 684.

Alfred Niemann: “Kaiser und Revolution,” p. 43.



that at the front reinforcements and supplies of war material were no longer adequate."\*

General von Kuhl described in his evidence before this Committee the way in which the German forces were dwindling towards the end. He said that:—

"The heavy losses could no longer be replaced. *Our reinforcements were exhausted.* In August, 1918, we had to break up ten divisions and in October, twenty-two divisions. . . .

The Supreme Army Command found itself at the end of July compelled to reduce the establishment field strength of the battalions on the Western Front from 850 men to 700 men. It was soon evident, however, that even this strength of 700 men could not be maintained. . . . In August, the battalions of the (German Crown Prince's) Army Group maintained an average field strength of only 660 to 665 men. But the real combatant strength . . . was a long way below this figure. In reckoning the field strength was included not only those sick in hospitals or billets, those on leave and on the details, but those who had been missing up to three months, a number which steadily grew all through the summer. . . ."†

On August 17th, Ludendorff wrote to demand that the 1900 class of recruits—i.e. lads in their eighteenth year—should be placed at his disposal in the field depots of the Western Front, for him to transfer into the line at his discretion. The more mature of this class had already passed into the fighting line. His letter concluded:—

"I know all the objections that can be raised to this early application of the juvenile class. But I see no other way to keep the army in the field at a sufficient fighting strength to face its tasks."‡

The German Army was thus melting away, while the Allies were being reinforced by the steadily rising flood of American troops. Nor was the difference between the two forces confined to the growing disparity of their numerical strength. The collapse of morale on the German side was yet more disastrous. Von Kuhl complained that the new recruits forthcoming in the closing stages of the War were a source of weakness rather than of strength; for they had been dragged unwillingly from safe, well-paid work in munition factories and many of them were imbued with Bolshevism. Whenever

\* "Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918," Vol. I, p. 23.

† *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 208 and 209.

‡ *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 67 and 68.

ssible, they went sick. At the first opportunity, they ran away. They were insubordinate and mutinous. He speaks of the number of shirkers that were lost to the battle line: —

“ Behind the front, hundreds of thousands of shirkers crowded up at the railway stations and the larger centres. Men who had been worked on by agitators when on leave moved about in masses behind the front, without seeking out their own units. So at the decisive moment, hundreds of thousands were lost from the front. . . .”\*

The knowledge was slowly permeating all ranks of the army that the War was lost. Towards the end this sense of overwhelming defeat swept like a wave over the population in the Fatherland. For many years they had believed themselves invincible, and as recently as midsummer of 1918 they had been promised a final victory and a triumphant peace. The brilliant and easy victory of June over the French, following the tremendous victories of March and April over the British Army, seemed conclusively to demonstrate that the promises of the military leaders were not vain boasts. And now came these incomprehensible set-backs. It is idle for von Kuhl to lay the blame for the revulsion of feeling that ensued amongst the German people at the doors of pacifist agitators and Bolshevik emissaries. We had these in our country. But the conditions under which they operated were more favourable in Germany than they were in Britain. The bulk of the German population—especially the workmen, the professional classes and the small *rentiers*, were suffering privation as the result of the blockade. Men and women will endure a great deal if they can see a glimmer of hope at the end of the journey. The disintegration of the home front in Germany is attributed largely to the “lying propaganda” which the Allies organised. But the deadliest quality in the propaganda was its truth. Facts such as those relating to the numbers of American troops now in France, or the progress of our campaigns against Germany’s allies, the failure of the submarine campaign and the numbers of submarines we had sunk, were not made public in Germany by the authorities, for obvious reasons; but they formed highly useful information for us to drop from the air in the German ranks or behind their lines. And their great virtue was that they were correct. Our Ministry of Information arranged for a good deal of propaganda in this order to be disseminated across the frontiers. It was done with great skill and subtlety. The credit for its success is due to Lord Caverbrook and Lord Northcliffe. A favourite method was to attach supplies of leaflets to little balloons, which could be released when a strong west wind was blowing, and in favourable circumstances

\* *ibid.*, p. 212.

would carry, not only into the back areas of Belgium and the occupied parts of France, but across the frontier into Germany. By this and by other channels we did a great deal to enlighten the troops and civilian population of the enemy as to the failure of their leaders to avert defeat. But such propaganda would have been a vain flutter in the air if the blockade were broken through in the east or were transferred to the Allies by the action of the submarines, or if the Germans continued to smash into one Allied Army after another and drive them out of their entrenchments. In these operations there would be a certainty of approaching triumph to sustain the hearts of the German people.

In another important respect the Entente had a great superiority to aid their march to victory. This was the tank, the newest and most potent weapon yet devised for assault and advance. The Somme, Passchendaele and Cambrai had between them taught us the supreme lesson that tanks might prove irresistible provided they operated in large numbers and on suitable ground. Had our original programme been carried out and had G.H.Q. realised the importance of this weapon, we should have had an adequate supply which would have saved life. But the casualties amongst them were heavy and not enough allowance had been made for that fact. The Germans surprisingly neglected to develop this new device, even after they had witnessed its effectiveness. Its failure through stupid use at the Somme and Passchendaele and through ineffective exploitation of its success at Cambrai had misled the Germans as to its possibilities. Ludendorff was not greatly impressed by the tank in its early days. In the winter of 1916-17 he held that the time had not yet come for them to go in for tanks, and in 1918 he declared that his assaults would succeed without them. A few German tanks were built, but they were clumsy and of low efficiency. But the tactics of the massed tank attack, which proved so successful in breaking the German line at Cambrai in November, 1917, were adopted by the Allies repeatedly in 1918. As we have seen, they were the spearpoint of the French thrust on July 18th which was the turn of the tide. Their nimble little tanks dashed through the German lines and created confusion and dismay. They similarly opened the British attack of August 8th and were largely responsible for that notable victory and still more for its depressing effect on the German Army. Four hundred and fifteen fighting tanks went over the top at zero hour that morning, and in all the engagements of the succeeding days, tanks played their part in smashing a way for the infantry, crashing through entanglements, sweeping across trenches, everywhere scattering and stampeding the enemy forces, circumnavigating machine-gun nests and receiving as little hurt from their sting as from ant-heaps in the path of a rhinoceros.

General von Kuhl admits that our tanks in the summer and



autumn of 1918 achieved decisive results against "the thin lines of the worn-out German troops." A representative of the German High Command, explaining the situation to party leaders of the Reichstag on October 2nd, 1918, said that: —

"The enemy employed them in unexpectedly large numbers. Where, after a very thorough-going blanketing of our positions with smoke-clouds, they made surprise assaults, the nerves of our fellows frequently could not stand the strain. In such cases, they broke through our forward lines, cleared the way for their infantry, appeared at our rear, produced local panics, and broke up in confusion the arrangements for directing the battle. . . ."

The speaker went on to say that: —

"We were not in a position to bring against the enemy a corresponding number of German tanks. To produce them was beyond the power of our industry, strained as it was to the uttermost, unless other important affairs had been let slide."

The reasons given by the apologists of the German Army Command for their failure to develop tanks are in themselves a condemnation of the Staff policy in Britain and Germany of combing out all able-bodied men from industry and thrusting them into the trenches. Von Kuhl admits that: —

"Without a doubt, German industry would have achieved the production of tanks, if that task had in good time been definitely and insistently set before it."

But Ludendorff suffered, as did our own Generals, from the illusion that all he needed to ensure victory was to have masses and masses of men with rifles. A few battalions more or less would not in fact have turned the scale between defeat and victory, whereas if they had been employed in manufacturing tanks, the effectiveness of the remaining battalions would have been multiplied manifold, and might have proved decisive. As our own official "History of the Ministry of Munitions" remarks, in the production of tanks, "the amount of labour required was small in relation to the tonnage involved, and the demands of the contractors were met by the War Labour Supply Department." Indeed, in the autumn of 1918, when their man-power was at its lowest ebb, the Germans for the first time began seriously to attempt to produce tanks on a large scale—forced hereto by a belated recognition of their decisive importance. The trouble was one of the optimum distribution of the man-power available. In the matter of tanks as well as in that of machine-guns and

heavy guns, the common sense of the civilian, informed by intelligent advice from officers who were too independent to win high promotion, had saved the Allies from the narrowness and rigidity of Generals at the top. In this country, we insisted, in the teeth of a furious outcry from Staff officers and their friends, on retaining in the industrial side of warfare the men needful for equipping our forces with those mechanical aids and armaments which would avail to save their lives and ease their task. In Germany the military had become altogether supreme over the civil authorities, and in consequence Ludendorff got his men for the trenches, but without supporting them by some of the deadliest machinery with which his foemen were so lavishly equipped. And in the summer and autumn of 1918 he paid dearly for it. There were some shrewd observations made by Sir Austen Chamberlain in the course of a discussion on man-power, when the military authorities were pressing hard for more men for the trenches at the expense of other essential national services:—

“. . . The question which had in the past been put to the Army Council had never been answered—namely, assuming that a choice had to be made between a considerable reduction of men in the Army and a proportionate reduction in munitions and supplies including those to our Allies, which would the War Office prefer? The Adjutant-General of the day had always answered that they must have the men, while the Master-General of Ordnance and the Quartermaster-General had said that they must have the supplies.”

The French military authorities were also pressing us to comb out more men. At the same time they were urging us to supply them with more steel, food and other commodities. Sir Austen Chamberlain thought they also ought to be asked to choose.

After the British victory of August 8th, the story of the further fighting in the summer and autumn of 1918 becomes one of a series of hammer strokes by the Allies against their dwindling and disheartened foes, first here, then there, generally simultaneously on left, centre and right. They gave the enemy no rest and sent him staggering back from even his strongest positions. In these operations Haig earned high credit. He was fulfilling a rôle for which he was admirably adapted: that of a second in command to a strategist of unchallenged genius. Foch was responsible for the general plan of attack on the whole front. Haig, Pétain and Pershing worked out the details of the attack in their respective sectors and directed the onset with expert intelligence and resolution. The losses of Haig's expeditionary force in the spring battles had been made good to such an extent that its combatant strength in France in spite of its hideous losses was not reduced when in August the general offensive began.

a striking force it was far more powerful than it was in March, on account of the steady growth of its special mechanised units, worth many times their man-power total in effectiveness. Owing to the energy which Mr. Winston Churchill threw into the production of munitions, between March 1st and August 1st the strength of the Tank Corps increased by 27 per cent., and that of the Machine-Gun Corps by 41 per cent., while the number of aeroplanes in France rose 40 per cent. In view of the pessimistic forebodings of both Pétain and Haig during the Versailles discussions as to the probable condition of the Allied Armies by the summer and early autumn of 1918, it would be well to give here the French estimate prepared in August, 1918, of the actual Allied and German strength at that date. The Allies' "combatant effectives" are placed at 4,002,104; the Germans at 3,576,900. The Allied artillery is placed at 21,843 pieces; the Germans at 18,100. The Allies had 5,646 aeroplanes; the Germans 1,000. The Allies had 1,572 tanks; the Germans practically none. This decisive superiority in men and machinery was increasing week by week. Americans were pouring in at the rate of 50,000 to 60,000 per week and Allied workshops were turning out an increasing output of guns, tanks and aeroplanes. This official calculation was not revealed at the time. An essential part of the Staff strategy at this stage was to underestimate Allied numbers and to exaggerate those of the enemy, in order to keep politicians up to the mark in the supply of men and material. As a temporary device this method may have been excusable but as a historical record it is misleading.

On August 21st the Third British Army struck at the German salient in Flanders, and a week later the First Army extended this thrust northwards. These attacks drew the German reserves up to Flanders, and the Fourth Army was able then to renew its advance at the Amiens Front. By the 26th we had regained Albert and a considerable stretch to the north, and during the following week we broke across the Hindenburg line in front of Arras, captured Mount Quentin and Péronne further south, and turned the line of the upper Somme. The French were making corresponding advances to the south of us, by means of the same tactics of successive, related strokes. By the latter part of August we were back on or beyond the front we had held at the beginning of the year along almost the whole line. In one part of the line the Allies recovered territory which had been in possession of the enemy since September, 1916. The Americans had in a brilliant action pinched out the St. Mihiel salient, south of Verdun, and once more taught the enemy an uncomfortable respect for their fighting quality.

By the latter part of August almost the whole of the operations which Foch had envisaged in his Memorandum of July 24th as constituting the first stage of his offensive had been completed—indeed, along most of the front the advances achieved were well in advance



of what he had laid down as the necessary minimum—and the stage was now set for the second part of the offensive, a general assault along the whole line with the object of hurling back the enemy forces in defeat towards their own frontier.

That this phase of the battle was in sight had been clearly forecast by Foch as early as the end of August, and on the 30th of that month he had drawn up a scheme and communicated it to the Commander-in-Chief, outlining a general assault by the Allied Armies. He proposed that the Americans, after reducing the St. Mihiel salient, which was one of the preliminary operations noted by him on July 24, should attack northward, west of the Meuse. The French should press forward in the centre, the British on their left, and the Belgians and British in Flanders. He followed this up on September 3rd by a written General Instruction to the Commanders-in-Chief, outlining the different operations to be undertaken along the whole front; and on September 8th he wrote asking Sir Douglas Haig to prepare and launch without delay an offensive to capture the Hindenburg line and to advance beyond it towards Valenciennes, Solesmes, Le Cateau and Wassigny. Next day he arranged personally with the King of the Belgians for the Flanders advance, and proceeded to confirm the arrangements with Haig and Plumer. As ultimately fixed his schedule was:—

September 26th: A Franco-American attack between the Suippe and the Meuse.

September 27th: An attack by the British First and Third Armies in the general direction of Cambrai.

September 28th: An attack by the Flanders Group of Armies between the sea and the Lys, under the command of the King of the Belgians.

September 29th: An attack by the British Fourth Army, supported by the French First Army, in the direction of Busigny.

Finally, he ordered the French Tenth Army to prepare for an attack across the Chemin des Dames, which could be launched the moment the enemy was shaken and in the toils of these successive offensives.

Before these attacks materialised events had occurred in other theatres which made the German position hopeless and convinced the most stout-hearted amongst their leaders that the cause of the Central Powers was irretrievably doomed. All the allies of Germany were beaten and acknowledged that they could no longer keep up the fight. The Austrians had been sagging right through the year. They were on the point of abandoning the struggle in January and February, but Germany pulled them back, partly by a feed of corn partly by implicit threats. The victories of the spring and the early

summer kept them steady so long as they were allowed to lean on the parapet of their trenches. But when under German prodding they got over the top and essayed a feeble offensive they were easily beaten and driven back into their mountain fastnesses, and they waited in their dug-outs for news of a German victory. This stumbling conglomerate of Southern Germans, Magyars, Yugo- and Czech-slavs and Roumanians all belonged to brave races which have always shown fearless courage in the multitude of wars that, for unknown centuries, they have fought against others and each other. But the heart was out of them by 1918. Hunger and privation had depressed their vitality. They had no cause which inspired and maintained them to endure years of hardship. They had no purpose that united them in common sacrifices. Their rulers were persuaded in February to postpone negotiations for peace in order to give the Germans their chance of making a final dash for victory. The second great defeat of the Marne convinced them that the game was up and that Germany could not win. This decided them to make peace without delay. Every effort was made to dissuade them from peace overtures to the Allies. But in the first week in September, Austria issued the note which definitely started Austria on the slide to surrender. Then followed on September 15th the defeat and collapse of Bulgaria. The Allies on that date broke through the German-Bulgarian line. The barrier of the Balkans was penetrated. The Bulgarians retreated and would listen to no appeal from the Germans to continue the fight. They sought an armistice. The South-Eastern Front of the Central Empires was uncovered and the road to Constantinople was also opened. The Allied Army of Salonika made preparations for advancing to and afterwards across the Danube and another Allied contingent was to march on Constantinople. In Mesopotamia the Turkish Army was annihilated and by the 20th of September Allenby had destroyed the last army of the Turks in Palestine. Germany, before the combined assault of the West was launched by the Allies, had already been abandoned by all her allies and we took the necessary measures to acquaint her soldiers and her people with the facts. The Germans were in the position Napoleon was in when he was deserted by his allies and when he was being driven out of Germany by an overwhelming allied force, while the British Army was advancing from the south, and French politicians and Generals alike were clamouring for a speedy peace in order to avert utter disaster to their country. In such circumstances the spirit of the bravest army quails. The despised underlings made their contribution towards the Allied triumph on the Western Front. Had Germany's allies stood firm, the loss of morale amongst the German troops which weakened their resistance and gradually disintegrated the Army would not have occurred. The certainty of disaster and the sense of impending encirclement

were largely responsible for the rapidity with which the Germans were driven out of formidable entrenchments which had defied the most tremendous Allied onslaughts for years.

While Germany's allies were thus deserting her, Foch set his programme in operation, and the whole Western Front burst into flames, from the North Sea to Lorraine. Never in the history of human rage has there been such a vast eruption of destructive fury. The operations on each sector were in the hands of the Commander-in-Chief of the particular group of Allied forces—Belgian, British, French, American—responsible for the attack; but behind them all the master-mind of Foch was at work, planning his successive hammer-strokes, and organising the distribution of forces and reserves so as to secure the maximum effect. And on the battlefield the Allied troops pressed forward with a new confidence, born of the well-grounded certainty that they were now superior in men, material and leadership, that a complete victory had already been achieved on other fronts and that final triumph on the most formidable front of resistance was in sight. The enemy could no longer stand up against the impact of the impending assault.

Beyond a doubt, one of the most brilliant performances and decisive strokes of this succession of colossal battles was the smashing blow delivered by Haig and his dauntless Army of British and Dominion troops at the Siegfried line between Marcoing and St. Quentin. The Germans, not without reason, thought they had made that line impregnable, and the very troops who overran it could hardly understand their own achievement when they examined afterwards in cold blood the defences they had stormed: immense tank-proof trenches, sunken fields filled with barbed-wire entanglements, strong points and machine-gun nests, and vast shell-proof dug-outs and underground chambers, where whole battalions could shelter from a barrage—and the highly fortified line of the Canal du Nord adding a natural and seemingly impassable obstacle in the heart of this network of massive and ingenious defences. It was strongly held, too, for the American attack in the Argonne which was to have diverted the German forces southwards did not in fact succeed in doing so in time to affect this struggle. Ludendorff records in his *Memoirs* that the effect of this blow was such as to compel him to order a general retirement of his whole front from the Scarpe to the Vesle, and to evacuate the salient on the Lys in Flanders. By September 28th, the British had smashed through the incredible defences of the Siegfried line in front of Cambrai and crossed the Canal du Nord, while in combination with the Belgians they had launched a thrust in Flanders which carried them well beyond the furthest limit of the Passchendaele offensive of evil memory. As an illustration of the unsuitability of this ground for a crucial campaign, it has to be noted that although this attack in Flanders me-



little opposition, it had to be suspended for a fortnight because the transport was bogged. The French had also made considerable progress on their front. On September 28th, as Ludendorff records in his book: "The General Staff and its Problems," he and Hindenburg came to the conclusion that the only course left for them was to demand an immediate armistice, and to offer to conclude peace in terms of President Wilson's Fourteen Points.

The outlook for Germany was summed up by Ludendorff in a report of September 30th, in which he reviewed the situation on the various fronts, the collapse of Bulgaria and threatened collapse of Turkey and Austria, and the weakness in the West. Of this last he said: —\*

"The position on the Western Front is well known. Twenty-two German divisions must be broken up. The numerical superiority of the Entente thus increases to 30 or 40 divisions. The 38 American divisions have a particularly high establishment. On the other hand, the strengths of our divisions are progressively dwindling. Several divisions only exist on paper.

It is not, however, the low strengths of our divisions which make our position serious but rather the tanks which appear by surprise in ever increasing numbers. . . . Owing to the effect of the tanks our operations on the Western Front have now practically assumed the character of a game of chance. The General Staff can no longer work with definite factors. . . ."

Between mid-March and October 1st the strength of the German armies had been reduced by more than one and a half million men. General von Kuhl describes its further wastage in the following terms: —

"During the heavy defensive battles of October, the average field strength of the battalions fell, at the beginning of the month to 545, at the middle of the month to 508, and at the end of the month to 450 men. If you deduct from these the non-combatants, these numbers corresponded to a combatant strength of 250, 208, and 142 men. In the end the divisions mostly counted only 800 to 1,200 rifles."†

The smashing through the rear of the Siegfried line, followed a few days later by the fall of Cambrai, simultaneously with a powerful thrust towards Lille in the north, sent the whole German front reeling backwards. Ludendorff had confidently expected to be able to stand on his great fortress line, and let the Allies weary

\* "The General Staff and its Problems," Vol. II, p. 164.

† "Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918," Vol. III, p. 210.

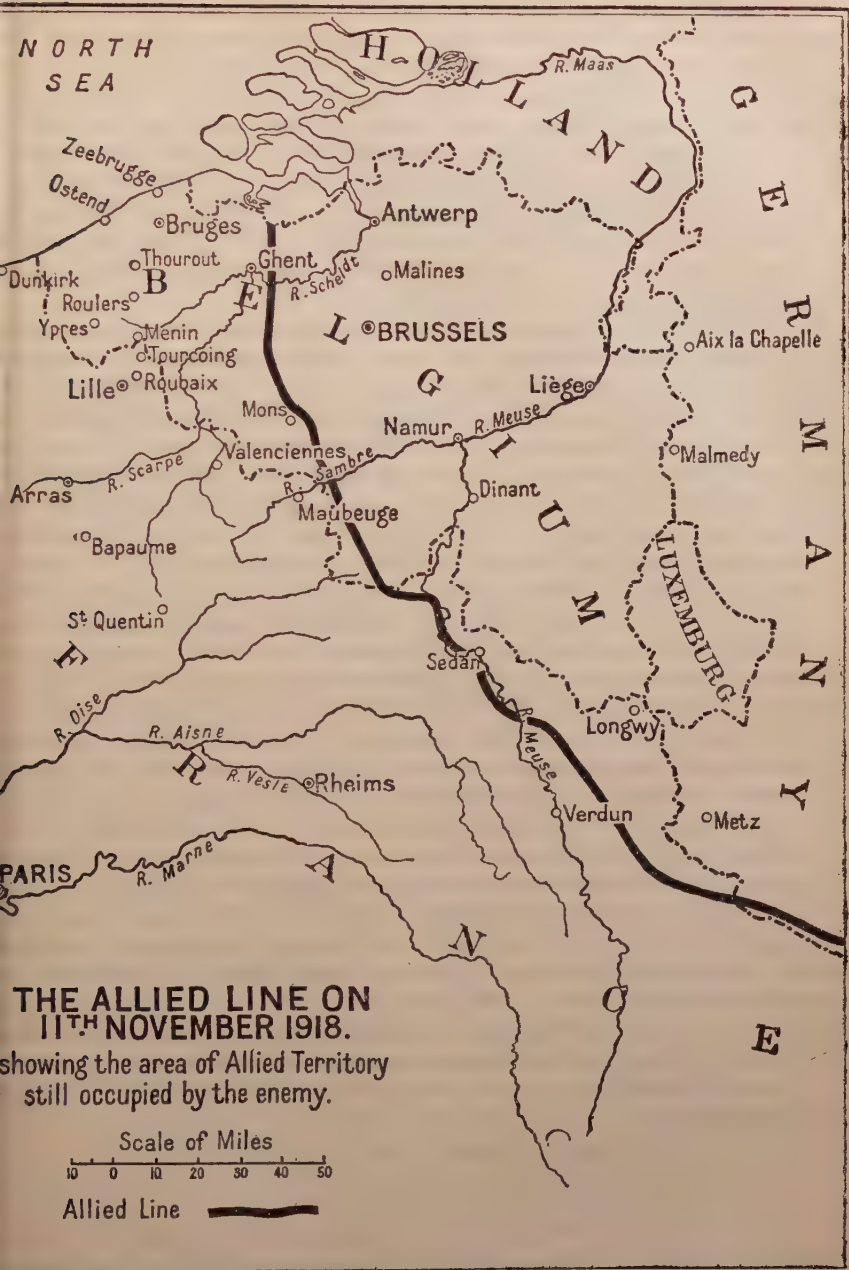
and waste themselves against it until they were willing to come to terms. The ceaseless body blows delivered with increasing power by the Allied forces left the German Army breathless and helpless. But it is fair to acknowledge that they retreated fighting for every kilometre they had ultimately to concede.

It was not a chase and hardly a pursuit. Starved, decimated, despairing, the German soldiers fought on, making us pay a heavy price for every mile we wrested from them. Throughout the whole War the Germans had shown themselves doughty fighters, but there was nothing finer in their record than the pluck with which they continued to withstand us in the hour of their defeat. They could not but know that they were beaten. At home their families were starving. Yet in the month of October, the last whole month of the War, the British forces in France suffered over 120,000 battle casualties as evidence of the resistance they encountered. Between July 1st and the conclusion of hostilities the British battle casualties in fighting a beaten foe and a foe that knew he was beaten on every Front totalled 430,000 in killed, wounded, prisoners and missing. During practically the same period the French lost 531,000 men and the Americans over 200,000. Let us do honour to a brave people with whom we have had but one deadly quarrel. They fought to the end with desperate valour. The heroic fight put up by some of the German units to the very last probably accounts for the fact that almost to the end our military leaders had no real understanding of the actual situation on the German side and did not comprehend the extent to which the break-up of Germany's allies in other theatres was affecting the German military situation. On the 16th of October the Chief of the Imperial General Staff gave to the Cabinet an appreciation of the military situation at that time on the Western Front.

He said:—

“The French Army was extremely fatigued, and the British Army was very tired, both Armies needing rest, whilst the American Army was hampered in its mobility by the inexperience of its Staff. The Germans, on the other hand, were the most fatigued of all the Armies fighting on the Western Front. In these conditions, and with the imminent approach of the mud rendering further movement very difficult, it was not easy to forecast what results it would be possible for the Allies to achieve before the approaching end of the fighting season.”

In reply to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, General Wilson said that it was a legitimate deduction from his remarks that there was nothing to warrant the assumption that the present military situation justified the Germans in giving in. In answer to a question as to



Stanford, London.



what would be the position if no decisive result was obtained in the next three weeks, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that the enemy would, in the north, probably take up his position behind the Scheldt to Valenciennes, with his right on Ghent, and that south of Valenciennes the enemy would have to remain on the uplands as far as the Aisne. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff gave a sketch of the forthcoming military operations in the Western theatre.

This view of the military situation on the Western Front was confirmed in every particular two days later by Sir Douglas Haig in the statement he made to the Cabinet. His appreciation of the situation is given in a subsequent chapter.\*

Both Sir Henry Wilson and Sir Douglas Haig had underrated the general demoralisation that had set in amongst the German people and had extended to their Army. Even on the Somme, on the Scarpe and at Passchendaele, when after months of hard fighting we only won a few kilometres, our soldiers never faltered. Now that they were driving the foe before them mile after mile and capturing one town after another there was a stimulant to valour which they had hitherto never tasted. By October 19th, Ostend and Zeebrugge had been regained and the Belgian coast at last cleared of the enemy. Courtrai, Roubaix, Lille, Le Cateau, were in our hands. The Americans were butting their way stubbornly in the Argonne, and between them and us the French were marching forward across departments that had been in German hands since the first year of the War. On October 26th Ludendorff resigned. On November 1st the Canadians entered Valenciennes. On the 4th Haig launched a great attack before which the German forces in that area finally crumbled and broke. The French were advancing steadily further still, pressing the German Army back to the frontier. The Americans were fighting a terrible battle in the Argonne. A mutiny broke out at Kiel where the sailors of the German Navy, ordered to sea to strike a last despairing blow, refused to obey, and hoisted the red flag. On the 9th of November the Kaiser abdicated. Two days before, the German delegates coming to negotiate an armistice had crossed the French lines. On November 10th, the British entered Mons. The Germans fought desperately to the last hour of the War. At 5.0 a.m. on the 11th of November, the Armistice was signed, and at 11 o'clock hostilities ceased along the whole front, from Holland to Switzerland.

\* Chapter LXXXV: "How Peace Came."

## CHAPTER LXXXIII

### AFTERMATH IN RUSSIA

#### GENERAL

THE condition of Eastern Europe after the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaties was one of extraordinary confusion. The Bolshevik authorities had agreed to the severing from the territory of the former Russian Empire of Finland, the Åland Islands, Esthonia, Livonia, Courland, Lithuania and Poland; of the Ukraine and the Caucasus; they had undertaken to demobilise all their military forces and intern their fleets; and they had pledged themselves to pay a tribute to the Central Powers and permit them to penetrate the country economically and exploit its resources. But the authority of the Bolshevik rulers over the territory they represented at Brest-Litovsk was a most uncertain quantity. They had only recently seized power by means of a *coup d'état*. They maintained it by methods of ruthlessness and terrorism. How far their dictatorship rested on popular consent it was hard to say, for the first Russian Constituent Assembly, which met on December 11th, 1917, a month after the Bolshevik revolution, was forcibly dispersed by Lenin's orders two days later. On January 15th, 1918, it met again, and on the following day it was once more forcibly dissolved. Lenin was not concerned about democratic government. His main purpose was the social and economic emancipation of the worker under any form of government that would be most suited to achieve that end. The Bolsheviks were numerically a small party, drawn almost entirely from amongst the town workers, and their grip on power was not based on any principle of majority rule, gauged by the counting of heads, but on the right of the strongest, measured in terms of firm will, clear purpose and armed force. The peasants acquiesced with the patient docility of a people accustomed for generations to autocratic rule.

Since they made no pretence of consulting the chosen representatives of Russian opinion, it was obviously very hard for observers outside Russia to be sure whether their government had come to stay or whether it was only a brief interlude of despotic authority by a group of sectarians, which before long would give place to a more conventional rule. Quite certainly there were very large sections of the population in Russia that bore no love for the Bolshevik masters established in Moscow and Petrograd. Indeed, the whole country

appeared to be disintegrating. Province after province of the former Empire was breaking off and declaring its independence, and the areas which were not definitely organising themselves on separatist lines were derelict and chaotic, without any stable government of their own or any coherent, systematic affiliation to the Central Government. They formed their local committees or Soviets, but these were not necessarily in sympathy with Lenin.

Democratic self-government is an art which it takes a nation long years to learn. Russia was far from having acquired it. Kerensky had for some months deceived himself and us into imagining that the Russian Socialists could at a bound pass from abject subservience to Czarist autocracy into a steady and responsible self-control and orderly administration. Actually the Russians had been accustomed to the rule of the strong hand; and for good or evil the strongest hand on the board was that of Lenin. But no one could at that time say whether a stronger than he would arise. He was a Communist; but whilst fanaticism does not always endow its possessor with great administrative ability, it is not incompatible with a genius for government, and no one can doubt that Lenin was one of the greatest leaders of men ever thrown up in any epoch. Only a few months earlier he had reached Russia in a sealed carriage, in which the Germans had passed him across Central Europe, as they would some plague bacillus they wanted to loose upon their enemies. One small, solitary figure he had now risen to supreme power. But he was balanced there precariously. He and his Bolshevik colleagues depended on their hastily organised formations of Red troops drawn from the ranks of the Communist workmen of the towns and of police drawn partly from the Czarist police service. Their army had one of the qualities which made the Ironsides such a formidable fighting force. Their fanaticism partook of the fierce religious zeal which inspired the Cromwellian. Until the Communist recruits had been fully trained and equipped and the Red Army was efficient, it could put up no fight against the German invaders. Much of the strength of the Bolsheviks lay in the inertia of public opinion, its disintegration and the lack of unity among possible opponents. They rested mainly for support on the industrial workers in the towns—who themselves formed but a small minority among the overwhelmingly agricultural population of Russia. Outside the towns there was no firm support of the Bolshevik Government. The Cossacks who dominated in the east and south-east were openly hostile.

The way in which the Russian Empire had broken up can be shown by the following dates:—

12th September, 1917.—Poland's independence of Russia was recognised by the Central Powers, which granted her a temporary constitution.



20th September, 1917.—A Council of the Trans-caucasian peoples, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Daghestan, proclaimed Transcaucasia a Federal Republic.

20th November, 1917.—The Ukraine proclaimed itself an independent Republic.

28th November, 1917.—Esthonia declared its independence.

6th December, 1917.—Finland declared its independence.

23rd December, 1917.—Bessarabia formed independent Moldavian Republic.

4th January, 1918.—Finland's independence was recognised by Russia, France and Sweden.

12th January, 1918.—Latvia declared its independence.

9th February, 1918.—Ukraine made a separate peace with the Central Powers.

By the time the Russians had signed the peace treaty of Brest-  
itovsk with the Central Powers, German forces had captured the  
ussian islands in the Baltic, had pushed up through the Baltic pro-  
nces to within 150 miles of Petrograd, and were steadily pressing  
rward across the Ukraine in South Russia. From the south-east, the  
ossacks of the Don under General Alexeieff had risen against the  
olsheviks and marched on Moscow, but had been defeated in  
ebruary. Eastward, the whole of Russia-in-Asia was a disorganised  
onfusion, where the conflicting motives of Bolshevism, Nationalism,  
an-Turanianism, and Pan-Islamism rallied groups to rival standards  
one district and another. Where bands of former German and  
ustrian prisoners drew together they sought to get control of affairs  
the interests of the Central Powers; and where compact forces of  
zecho-Slovaks had prior to the Bolshevik ascendancy been fighting  
n the Russian side, they strove to continue their struggle against the  
dvancing forces of the Germans. With the collapse of the Russian  
ensive in Asia Minor, the Turks had again plucked up courage to  
ush up towards Transcaucasia. In all these areas, Bolshevism was  
orking locally like a ferment. But while it was breaking down the  
d social and administrative structure, it was as yet far from supply-  
g an organised and connected alternative system of government.  
hat it might in time do so appeared for the moment scarcely prob-  
le. A still victorious Germany had already obtained a measure of  
ontrol over Finland and the Baltic provinces, Poland and the  
kraine. She was pressing eastwards along the north of the Black  
ea, while her ally, Turkey, was once more advancing along the south,  
wards the Caucasus and Caspian. If Germany could escape defeat  
the World War, it seemed likely that she would emerge with a great  
tension of her power in the east; with at least a suzerainty over the  
ng of puppet states she had erected between the Baltic and the  
lack Sea; with a wide band of controlled territory running to the

Caspian, and possibly across Siberia to the Pacific. It was apprehended that the destructive working of Bolshevism might in fact prove merely to have broken up and ploughed a field in readiness for planting with Prussianism.

Although the Bolshevik Government of Russia had deserted the Entente and signed a separate peace with Germany, it was obvious in these circumstances that the Entente could not afford to abandon Russia to the domination of Germany. We could not acquiesce in the vast accession of strength which Prussian Imperialism stood to gain from its treaty spoils, especially from its dominance over the Ukraine, which gave it access to great stores of wheat and cattle, to the coal of the Donetz basin, and ultimately, by way of the Black Sea and the Caucasus, to the vast oil deposits of the Caspian. If Germany succeeded in provisioning itself freely from these sources, the whole effect of our blockade would be lost.

There can be no question that throughout 1918, the German looked to Russia, not merely to supply them with substantial territorial gains to reward them for their war effort, but still more as a vitally important source of foodstuffs and fodder, of oil and minerals. By controlling the Ukraine and the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Caspian, and penetrating into Siberia, they hoped to escape from the stranglehold of the Allied blockade. In those regions, rich in natural resources, they expected to secure immense stocks of cereals and meat draught animals for their army transport, leather, petroleum, copper and iron. Had their hopes been fully realised, the War might have had a different outcome.

Further, there were very considerable military stores, warehouses or stacked at the ports of Archangel, Murmansk and Vladivostok which we had sent to Russia for use in her conflict with the Central Powers. Now that she had signed a peace treaty, the danger was that these would fall into the hands of Germany and be used against us. It was unlikely that the Bolshevik Government would hand them over to Germany out of good will, but it might be forced to do so under pressure. German forces were pressing into Finland, and could easily advance thence to the Murman coast and the White Sea. In Siberia there were Austrian and German troops at large, formed of released prisoners. And German agents were active everywhere.

I have described in a previous chapter the attitude which we and our Allies had decided to adopt in regard to Russia's new rulers. It was not our duty to settle the political order of Russia. We did our best to maintain friendly diplomatic relations with the Bolsheviks, and we recognised that they were *de facto* rulers of the region of old Great Russia. But there were now wide areas in which the *de facto* rule was in other hands. There were nationalist movements dominating the Volga and the Don; Georgians and Armenians forming independent governments in the Caucasus; and in the vast, confuse

ea of Siberia there were local autonomies, Bolshevik and non-Bolshevik, Cossacks, and compact formations of Czecho-Slovaks, organised out of Czechs and Slovaks resident in Russia at the outbreak of the War, and of companies and regiments of those nationalities that had given themselves up *en masse* in the course of the War, rather than fight for Austria. They had fought alongside the Russians for the Allies, and when Bolshevik Russia laid down her arms, they continued to stand for the Allied cause, from the victory of which alone they could hope to see Czecho-Slovakia gain her independence, and return to their home-country without being arrested as traitors. The Bolsheviks, while not willing allies of Germany, were in a military sense at her mercy. But the various Russian nationalist movements were strongly opposed to Germany's progressive invasion of their country. And while we did not desire to take sides as between nationalist and Bolshevik in their struggle for the control of Russia's government, we were interested parties in regard to their respective assistance to German penetration.

General von Kuhl, in his evidence before the German Reichstag committee after the War, devotes very considerable space to an examination of the question whether more forces could have been brought over from the Eastern Fronts to the West in 1918, to reinforce their dwindling effectives against the Anglo-French onset. His conclusion was that it could not have been done. Had the Germans abandoned their project of forcing a decision in France and remained on the defensive there, they might have overrun Russia and temporarily conquered it. But once they decided on a great offensive in the West, it was imperative that they should withdraw their best troops from the East. Their forces in Russia had, in fact, been reduced to the west point consistent with maintenance of the policy of exploiting the Ukraine and Southern Russia for supplies. Von Kuhl's account of the food shortage in Germany and Austria and of the vital need of drawing supplies from Russian sources, is very revealing. As early as December 15th, 1917, he says, a letter from the Secretary of the War Food Ministry was forwarded to Ludendorff which stated that:—

"the state of our food supplies of breadstuffs and provisions makes it a matter of extreme urgency to give first place to the possibility of bringing corn from Russia. . . . Quite apart from the position of Austria, it is for us ourselves of decisive importance for carrying on the War that the possibility of bringing in corn should be realised."\*

He cites the evidence of Count Czernin as to the still more desperate state of Austria. In January, 1918, when the Brest-Litovsk negotiations were in progress, the Count noted that:—

\* "Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918," Vol. III, p. 16.



"a catastrophe resulting from lack of food was actually knocking at the door. Total collapse could hardly be averted; the situation was terrible. . . . The outbreak of revolution would be unavoidable if they could not succeed in securing help in the shape of corn. At the same time, Count Czernin cast his eyes on the Ukraine. 'We have hopes of securing supplies from the Ukraine, if we are only successful in maintaining ourselves without disturbance for the next few weeks.'"<sup>\*</sup>

Von Kuhl cites evidence from General von Arz that at the end of December, 1917, a number of armies had not even a single day's ration of flour in their possession; and on January 5th, 1918, he informed the German Quartermaster-General that:—

"the Austro-Hungarian Army has for a number of weeks past been in such a critical state with regard to provisions that there are absolutely no reserve rations of flour or fodder-grain in hand, and we have had to reduce the daily bread ration to 280 grammes (10 oz) and the daily ration of fodder-grain to 1½ kilogrammes."<sup>†</sup>

Much more evidence of the same kind is given by von Kuhl. As a result, the Germans and the Austro-Hungarian forces invaded the Ukraine, and advanced to the Crimea, to get food. They obtained a certain amount, though nothing like as much as they had hoped. There was no ordered government, and the peasants burnt or buried their surplus rather than see it requisitioned by the foreigner. What they got was secured only by military force. Pleading with the German Government to send more soldiers to the Ukraine to secure their harvest, the Secretary of the War Food Ministry wrote on August 7th 1918:—

"In the new economic year there is a peril of complete collapse if we are unsuccessful in securing from the Ukraine those supplies for the final two months which cannot be obtained from home sources. . . ."<sup>‡</sup>

Statements such as these demonstrate that the enemy powers regarded their exploitation of Russian territory as vitally necessary to the maintenance of their war effort. Nor was the importance of the food and other supplies they were extracting thence the only issue for them. In addition, they felt they dare not leave Russia free to reorganise herself against them. As General von Kuhl says:—

"A peace could only be relied on with Soviet Russia if we were able to hold it in bounds and could protect our Eastern Front. The peace was in truth nothing but an armistice. The Soviet Government was our enemy for good and all. Besides, we had always sti-

<sup>\*</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 16 and 17.

<sup>†</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>‡</sup> *ibid.*, p. 30.

to reckon with an attempt on the part of the Entente to establish once again a front against us in Russia."\*

Ludendorff declares in his Memoirs that it would have been absurd to evacuate Russia, as they needed it for their own existence, and they tried to prevent it from being reinforced by the Entente. They also found it necessary to establish a cordon along the border of their occupation, with the aim of damming back the Bolshevik propaganda that was flooding across into Germany. Ludendorff even had hopes of raising troops among the Russians of the west and south. He remarks rhetorically that he had hoped—

"we should at least obtain some assistance from the sons of the land we had liberated from Bolshevik dominion."†

But the ungrateful Russians did not rush forward to fight his battles for him. Two divisions were formed in Germany of selected prisoners of war of Ukrainian origin. But "unfortunately they did not turn out well."

But if the Germans failed in the event to make quite so good a use as they hoped, and as we feared they would be able to do of their success against Russia, clearly we should have been extremely foolish to leave them a free hand there in view of the possibilities that existed, of war-time exploitation, and of permanent penetration and domination of Russia and Siberia. During the summer and autumn of 1918 we made a number of moves of which the main objects in the East were:—

To prevent Germany and Turkey from gaining access to the oilfields of the Caspian;

To prevent the military stores at Murmansk, Archangel and Vladivostock falling into enemy hands;

To succour the Czecho-Slovak troops in the Urals and Vladivostock, and enable them either to reconstitute an anti-German front in combination with the pro-Ally Cossacks and other Nationalist forces in Russia, or to withdraw safely and join the Allied forces in the West.

A constant preoccupation of the British War Cabinet and of the Inter-Allied Supreme War Council was to devise means whereby these objects could be secured. It was a complex and difficult task. The vast Russian Empire had been under one ultimate central control. It is the U.S.S.R. to-day. But from the autumn of 1917 onward, during the rest of the War period and for some time afterwards, the territory which had been the Russian Empire was broken up into regional organisations, independent governments, rival and warring

\* *ibid.*, p. 39.

† Ludendorff: "My War Memories," Vol. II, p. 566.

political combinations. And the conflicting efforts of the Central Powers and of the Entente criss-crossed through this medley in a bewildering tangle. Thus in Finland, Germany was supporting the White Guards against the Red or Bolshevik elements, and encouraging the Whites to advance across North Russia towards the Murmansk coast. In Siberia, German troops and agents were making common cause with the Bolsheviks against the pro-Ally Czecho-Slovaks and the nationalist Cossacks. In the Ukraine, the Bolshevik Government was destroying or removing the peasants' hoards of food, to prevent them from falling into German hands. In Baku, the Entente were supporting an anti-Soviet Government, since Lenin had conceded to the Germans the exploitation of the Caspian oil resources. The Bolsheviks would on principle keep no faith with either Germany or the Entente, save under compulsion, for their avowed aim was to bring to the ground every capitalist government, so that fundamental anti-pathy was the only policy we could expect from them. In that respect they treated both the belligerent coalitions with impartial suspicion and dislike; not that the Soviet Government were averse, as I shall point out, to seeking Allied assistance in an emergency. But we were fighting our last desperate battle in a Great War and we had to take our own measures to protect our vital interests in the East.

## 2. MURMANSK AND ARCHANGEL

There were two lines of approach for the Allies to Russia: one via the Arctic, through Murmansk and Archangel; and one via Siberia through Vladivostok. Our major concern was to keep these lines open.

During 1917, upwards of two million tons of military stores had been delivered by us at these ports. There were immense dumps of cannon, shells, clothing, etc., at Archangel and Murmansk, which owing to the wretched transport facilities of Russia had never been cleared to be used by the Russian Armies. During the summer there had been a small squadron of the British Navy operating there to convoy supply vessels and repel submarine attacks. A few of these vessels still remained in the Kola inlet at Murmansk during the winter of 1917-18.

When, after the refusal of the Soviet authorities to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Germans proceeded to advance on Petrograd, Trotsky grew terrified that they might now refuse to accept the Russian signature. On March 2nd, he telegraphed to the local Soviet government at Murmansk:—

“Peace negotiations apparently broken off. Danger threatens Petrograd. Measures are being taken to defend it to the last drop of blood. It is your duty to do everything for defence of Murmansk line. Germans are advancing in small bodies. Opposition possible and compulsory. Nothing must be left to the foe.



"You are ordered to co-operate with Allied Missions in everything and to put all obstacles in way of advance of Germans. The robbers are attacking us. We are obliged to save the country and the revolution."\*

The local authorities on this applied to Admiral Kemp for his help, and put forward their suggestions for united action to resist any advance by the Germans.

We were not at the moment able to spare troops for Murmansk, so we at once dispatched a cruiser, the *Cochrane*, to reinforce our squadron, and asked the French and the Americans to do the same. The French sent the *Amiral Aube*, which arrived there on the 19th March. Later on the United States sent the *Olympia*. It is worth noting that our expedition to Murmansk was undertaken at the invitation of the Russian Government and of the local Soviet. When, later on, the central authorities ceased to welcome our presence there, the local government continued to co-operate with us and supported us against Bolshevik attacks.

The signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty barred the Russians from any further naval activity. But sea transport to Murmansk and Archangel was still being threatened by German submarines, which also sank several Russian steamers and bombarded a Russian signal station. The Murmansk Soviet turned over their local naval force—three destroyers—to the Allies, the British, French and Americans each taking one, to defend the coast and Russian shipping against U-boat attacks.

But while the problem of maintaining a foothold at Murmansk was as fairly simple to handle, the Archangel situation was far more difficult. Archangel was impossible to approach by water until the summer should thaw the ice. It was, however, important to secure control of it for a number of reasons. A large body of Allied refugees had assembled there, unable to get through to Murmansk because Bolshevik troops had broken the line. There were a million tons of Allied stores there, including a large quantity of manganese, and these could probably be taken by the Germans, or sold to them by the Bolshevik Government, if left unguarded by us. At an Allied Diplomatic Conference held in London on March 16th, a report was considered from General Knox, which recommended that we should send a force of 5,000 men to Archangel; and annexed to this report was a message from Captain Proctor, the British Military Representative at Archangel, suggesting a joint Allied force of 15,000 troops. The matter was remitted for study to the Allied Naval Council and the Permanent Military Representatives at Versailles. But by the time these two bodies met in joint conference on March 23rd, the German offensive on the Western Front had broken out, and it was for the

\* "Official History: Naval Operations," Vol. V, p. 311.

moment impossible to consider a military expedition to North Russia.

As the spring advanced, the German threat to North Russia grew more serious. Finland was at this time virtually a German protectorate, with 20,000 German troops in it, and we gathered that they purposed to extend Finnish territory up to the Arctic, giving the Germans submarine bases on the Murmansk coast. Early in May Finnish troops advanced on Pechenga, a harbour to the west of the Kola inlet. But Admiral Kemp sent a force of Russians, at the request of the Murmansk Soviet, along with a detachment of Royal Marines, which met and drove back this attack.

By this time the Czecho-Slovak troops which had rallied together in Siberia were estimated at about 70,000, of which some 20,000 had moved off east to Vladivostock, while the remaining 50,000 were in Western Siberia. The Allies were of opinion that if these could be encouraged to make their way to North Russia, they would be able there to join hands with our forces and assist in re-forming an anti-German Front in the East. For this purpose it was necessary to go further with the organisation of pro-Ally forces there, and on May 17th we dispatched General Poole to Murmansk with a Military Mission of 500 officers and men, for organising the Czech troops it was hoped to rally there. He travelled on the American cruiser *Olympia*, which was proceeding to reinforce the British and French vessels at Murmansk, and on arrival was placed in command of all forces on shore.

The scheme of effecting a connection with the Czecho-Slovaks in North Russia made it imperative to occupy Archangel. But, outside the jurisdiction of the Murmansk Soviet, the Bolsheviks were now growing hostile to the Allies, and toward the end of June a force was dispatched from Petrograd for the purpose of ejecting us from Murmansk. At this the Murmansk Soviet decided by a resolution of a mass meeting of the local inhabitants to break off relations with Petrograd and Moscow, and thereafter we found ourselves in North Russia supported by the local people but in a state of war with the Bolsheviks.

Further British and French troops arrived in June and July, and on August 2nd, after some fighting, an Allied expedition occupied Archangel. In the following weeks it pressed some way up the Dvina, but the water-logged, fog-bound tundras were difficult country for operations. Some American reinforcements for the North Russian troops arrived in North Russia in September, but long before this all hope of making a junction with the Czecho-Slovak troops in Western Siberia had proved vain, and these had been reduced to fighting their way out eastwards to Vladivostock.

When the armistice was signed in November, the Archangel forces were securely frozen in at that port and along the lower Dvina. They had succeeded in the immediate objective of preventing the Germans from gaining a footing in the Arctic; and they had opened the road

escape to the considerable numbers of Allied refugees who had made their way northwards after the Bolshevik revolution. They had prevented the military stores which were piled up at Archangel and Murmansk from slipping into enemy hands and being used against us in the War. But the expedition had not attained the full strategic value which had at one time been hoped. It had failed to connect with the Czecho-Slovaks or to rally the general body of the Russian people to form an anti-German Front. The presence of German forces in Finland made it difficult for any bold move southwards from our North Russian bases, and the Bolsheviks themselves were far from desiring to co-operate with us. They were at enmity with Entente and Germans alike.

#### SIBERIA

An intervention on a much larger scale, and one which achieved a greater success in hampering the enemy, was that which we eventually carried out across Siberia from Vladivostock. It was an extreme example of the fact that the long way round may be the quickest in matters of strategy. Here we had to operate from the most distant of all bases, a port on the Pacific coast of Asia, across the whole isolate expanse of Siberia. Yet by this roundabout route we were in fact able to exert considerable pressure on the Germans in Russia, and render support to those forces which were opposing their penetration into the oil and corn areas.

The Allied policy in Russia after her military collapse is explained by the decisions taken at Versailles after the Bolshevik Government had entered into negotiations with Germany.

In December, 1917, the Military Representatives at Versailles brought under review the Russian situation. At that time the Bolshevik Government had ceased hostilities with the Central Powers, though neither Russia nor Roumania had yet made peace. In their joint Note No. 5, dated the 24th of December, 1917, the Military representatives pointed out the danger of Germany getting foodstuffs from South Russia, and by securing command of the Black Sea, gaining footing in the Caucasus. For such reasons they urged that:—

“without being able to guarantee that the troops of Southern Russia and Roumania are or are not able to resist the Bolsheviks helped by the Germans, the Military Representatives are of opinion that all national groups who are determined to continue the War must be supported by all the means in our power.

The Military Representatives realise that this resistance could not be sustained for an indefinite time unless it should prove possible to open a more direct communication between the Allies and our friends in Russia either by way of Vladivostock and the Siberian railway, or by operations in Turkey which might open a



direct route to Tiflis, or lead to a separate peace and the opening of the Dardanelles."

As I relate elsewhere, we did not succeed in the earlier part of 1917 in crushing Turkey so as to open the Dardanelles or gain possession of Tiflis. But the route *via* Vladivostock was, after some delay, exploited by us.

Among the various considerations which eventually led to our intervention there may be mentioned, first, the fact that there was at Vladivostock a big accumulation of military stores intended for use by our Russian allies against the Central Powers. We did not want these to be used by the hostile Bolsheviki for exterminating those non-Bolshevik movements in Russia which were still opposing the Germans; still less did we want them to be seized by Austro-German forces in Russia, or surrendered by the Bolsheviki to the enemy as a condition of peace. In the second place, Vladivostock remained our one channel of communication with the anti-German forces operating in Russia—the Cossacks of the Don and the Kuban, the non-Bolshevik governments of the Caucasus. Thirdly, it was imperative to prevent the Germans from penetrating into Siberia and securing a hold upon it and its great natural resources. There were considerable numbers of former enemy prisoners there—Germans and Austro-Hungarians—who had been captured by Russia in the course of the War—who were now holding together in the midst of the general chaos and were likely either to seize and garrison the important points of the country for the enemy, or to get back to Central Europe and reinforce the enemy armies against us. Fourthly, we were compelled to take note of the fact that our ally, Japan, was favourably placed for intervention on land across Siberia, and was showing a very lively interest in the situation there. It was difficult to refuse her proffered help. On the other hand, it was highly desirable that Britain and the United States should also be represented in any action taken. If Japan were allowed to operate independently, the Russians in Siberia would certainly suspect her, rightly or wrongly, of cherishing designs on their territory and that might throw them straight into the arms of the Central Powers.

As early as December, 1917, we had inquired of Japan and the United States their views as to the desirability of occupying Vladivostock and controlling the Trans-Siberian railway, which in the chaotic state of the country had ceased to function. At the beginning of January we learned that the Japanese had sent a warship to Vladivostock, so we promptly ordered the H.M.S. *Suffolk* to proceed thither. Her captain reported on his arrival that this action had dispelled the local suspicion aroused by the advent of the Japanese vessel, but that the Russian garrison and navy there were in a state of anarchy. In February he further reported that the Cossacks of Eastern Siberia had

ld a conference at Iman, where they had condemned Bolshevik policy and all attempts to make a separate peace, and had appealed to the Allies for financial and material assistance. At the beginning of March, when the conclusion of the Brest-Litovsk treaty was imminent, we received a further appeal from the Cossacks, who were ready, if supplied with food and arms, to take possession of the railway and establish an authority for the eastern half of Siberia which would be anti-German. We were told they could probably be induced to accept Japanese help if the other Allied Governments were co-operating with the Japanese.

This question of a possible Japanese intervention in Russia *via* Siberia became an acute preoccupation of the Allied Governments. It was at this stage impossible to foresee just how far the Germans could press their domination of Russian territory and resources, if left undisturbed by us. There was not merely the certainty that Germany would make effective use of the vast resources of foodstuffs, coal and oil which Russia was capable of yielding. We could not rule out the possibility that the Germans might start to enrol and train Russian man-power for use in the War. Such a development seemed well within the bounds of possibility. Napoleon had enrolled conquered races in his *Grande Armée*. The Germans themselves had it in mind to do the same. They had several Polish divisions in their army. Why not Russians too? Here were 180 millions of people, unorganised, without a settled Government, largely illiterate and so, presumably, easy victims of suitable propaganda, of whom large numbers were trained to arms and first-class fighting material, but now disbanded and out of work. The danger that Germany might establish a grip on this country and utilise its resources for supplying her deficiencies in food and material and its masses for her campaigns looked very formidable, and amply justified the efforts the Allies made to intervene in Russia and organise whatever elements they could influence to resist that peril.

Japan was one of our Allies in the War, but although she had formidable military forces, their remoteness from any of the War theatres had prevented any considerable use being made of them. Now, however, it seemed possible that the Russian situation might provide them with an opening. They were for entering Russia via Vladivostok and Siberia and rallying the Cossacks, Czechs and other pro-Allied elements there to resist the Germans. Against such a move had to be weighed the considerations that a Japanese invasion would irritate the Soviet Government, and excite the hostility of the Russian people, and thus drive them into the arms of Germany; that it was not part of our policy to risk any permanent establishment of Japan in Siberia; and that the goodwill and co-operation of the United States was any arrangement was essential.

At the Allied Diplomatic Conference held in London on March

16th, 1918, it was decided to send to the United States Government a despatch which had been prepared by Mr. Balfour, setting out the views of the British, French and Italian Governments upon the Russian situation and the possibility of Japanese intervention via Siberia. This despatch ran as follows:—

“ At a Conference of the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of France, Italy and Great Britain held on the 15th of this month in London, I was deputed to lay before the President of the United States of America their views on the expediency of Allied intervention in Eastern Russia for the purpose of checking the complete penetration of that country by enemy influences.

The danger, in the opinion of the Conference, is both great and imminent. Russia has utterly destroyed both her Army and her Navy; and she will never be permitted by Germany to reconstitute them. Her territory swarms with hostile agencies; such energies as she still possesses are expended in internal conflicts; and no power of resistance is left her against German domination. Her sole protection is to be found in the vast distances which the invaders must traverse before obtaining complete military occupation of her Empire.

Unfortunately, however, complete military occupation is quite unnecessary. What Germany desires is that Russia should be impotent during the War, subservient after it, and in the meanwhile should supply food and raw material to the Central Powers. All this can be effectually accomplished in the present helpless condition of the country, without transferring great bodies of troops from West to East.

Such is the disease. What is the remedy? To the Conference it seemed that none is possible except through Allied intervention. Since Russia cannot help herself she must be helped by her friends. But there are only two approaches through which such help can be supplied; the northern ports of Russia in Europe, and the eastern frontiers of Siberia. Of these, Siberia is perhaps the most important and is certainly the most accessible to the available forces of the Entente Powers. Both from the point of view of man-power and of tonnage, Japan is in a position to do much more in Siberia than France, Italy, America and Britain can possibly do in Murmansk or Archangel. It is therefore to Japan that, in the opinion of the Conference, appeal should be made to aid Russia in her present helpless condition.

The Conference was well aware that there are weighty objections to this course. Though Russia has gladly availed herself of Japanese assistance during the whole course of the War, there are many observers who think that, if that assistance now took the form of a Japanese Army operating on Russian soil, it would be regarded



with distrust, and even aversion. If this be so, it is doubtless due in the main to the fear that Japan would treat Russia in the east as Germany is treating her in the west, would rob her of her territory, and cover her with humiliation. No such suspicion can be entertained by those associated with Japan in the present War. If she intervenes at the present juncture, it will be as the friend of Russia and the mandatory of Russia's other Allies. Her object would not be to copy the Germans, but to resist them; and without doubt this would be made abundantly clear to all the world before any overt action was undertaken by Japan.

This, in brief, is the argument for Japanese intervention which the Conference desired me to lay before the President. I have only to add that, in its view, no steps could usefully be taken to carry out this policy which had not the active support of the United States. Without that support it would be useless to approach the Japanese Government, and even if the Japanese Government consented to act on the representations of France, Italy and Great Britain, such action, without the approval of the United States Government, would lose half its moral authority.

I earnestly trust, therefore, that favourable consideration will be given to a policy which, with all its admitted difficulty, seems required by the dangerous situation which has recently arisen in Eastern Europe.

Foreign Office,

A. J. BALFOUR.

16th March, 1918."

The sending of this despatch to President Wilson was the result of long pressure by the French, who were anxious to secure immediate intervention by Japan. I was, however, dubious as to the wisdom of such a step if it were likely to be strongly resented by the Russian Government, and felt it essential that any such action must be supported by the United States. When we learned that Wilson was opposed to Japanese intervention unless it were asked for by the Russians, we suggested that the problem might be solved by proposing a joint expeditionary force of Americans, British and Japanese, to which some of our advisers thought the Russians might agree.

On April 5th the Japanese landed some marines at Vladivostock to protect their nationals, as there was no proper government there, and three Japanese had been shot by robbers on the previous day. The British promptly landed a similar contingent, to ensure that any force made would be an Allied one, not an independent Japanese venture.

During the next three months there was continual discussion as to what course to pursue in Siberia. President Wilson was very unwilling to intervene there. It was admittedly difficult to foresee any very definite positive result that might be attained thereby in Russia. On the

other hand, unless the Germans collapsed completely in the West we foresaw that they could at need withdraw from France and Belgium and establish an almost impregnable front based on the Rhine, carrying out meanwhile a process of penetration and expansion in shattered Russia and Siberia which would leave them far bigger and stronger than ever when the War ended. It seemed worth while to make some effort to prevent this. And in any case, there were the Czecho-Slovak troops. At the meeting of the Supreme War Council on May 2nd, it was reported that between 40,000 and 50,000 of these were making the way to Vladivostock in the teeth of Bolshevik efforts to stop them. They were a very fine force, and worth using either in the East or the West against the enemy.

I have already referred to these Czecho-Slovak troops. Imperial Russia had been loth to use these potential allies, who were rebelling against the dominion of a sister Empire, even though she was momentarily an enemy. But after the revolution they were formed into the Czech Legion, and in 1917 it fought valiantly in the Russian Army on the Allied side. When Bolshevism overthrew the provisional revolutionary Government, the Czechs were in the Ukraine, where Ludendorff bears witness that they were the only serious opponent of his penetration of that region:—

“The Bolshevik troops offered very little resistance but the Czecho-Slovak troops—composed of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war—fought much better, and fierce engagements with them took place. Operations and actual fighting continued into May.”\*

Their subsequent activities also caused him grave annoyance, and he called forth an indignant, if rather inaccurate, protest from him. Further on in his Memoirs he remarks:—

“In Russia events had developed along lines of their own illustrative of the lying propensities of the Soviet Government. With the consent of this Government, the Entente had formed Czecho-Slovak units out of Austro-Hungarian prisoners. These were intended to be used against us, and were therefore to be conveyed to France by the Siberian railway. All this was sanctioned by a Government with whom we were at peace, and we actually took it lying down!”†

Actually, the Czech Legion was formed before ever the Soviet Government took office. And although that Government, which was at peace with us as well as with the Germans, nominally was willing that the prisoners of war of both sides should go home to their own countries, and accordingly gave the Czechs permission to proceed to Vladivostock for this purpose, it viewed these movements with

\* Ludendorff: “My War Memories,” Vol. II, p. 566.

† *ibid.*, p. 564.

creasing suspicion. The Soviet Government disarmed the Czechs and started to dispatch them across Siberia in detachments. The Czechs regarded these Bolshevik attentions with distrust and were not sure that the Soviet authorities had not a sinister purpose. But they were an athletic, disciplined, purposeful body of men, and tactics which might be abundantly successful against the disorganised and bewildered and terrified *bourgeoisie* were not adapted for dealing with such men as these. They disarmed the troops sent to attack them, and seized the Trans-Siberian railway. Thenceforward they were in a strong strategic position, both for securing their safe journey to Vladivostock, and for resisting Bolsheviks and Germans alike in Southern and Eastern Russia. It is not too much to say that the presence of the Czech Legion was the determining factor in our Siberian expedition. Not only were we bound to take the necessary steps to protect and succour them, but we were able by means of them to establish something like an anti-German front in South-East Russia and along the Urals. Ludendorff, though again inaccurate in stating that our object was to overthrow the Moscow Government, correctly summarises the importance of the part played by these troops when he says that:—

“The Entente, realising that they could not work with a Government which looked for support to Germany, took action against Bolshevism, and instead of sending these troops to France, held them up along the Siberian railway on the frontier between Russia and Siberia, in order to fight against the Government in Moscow. They gradually pushed forward to the middle Volga, in the direction of Kazan and Samara. In addition to this, by garrisoning the railway, the Entente prevented the return of our prisoners of war from Siberia. This was unquestionably a serious loss for us.

The new Entente front in Russia began with the Czecho-Slovaks on the middle Volga.”\*

The Germans here acknowledge that the measures we adopted inside Russia deprived them of a formidable reinforcement on the Western Front, and contributed materially to their failure to exploit the resources of Russia.

We were not concerned to overthrow the Bolshevik Government in Moscow. But we were concerned to keep them, so long as war with Germany was afoot, from overthrowing those non-Bolshevik administrations and movements outside Moscow which were prepared to work with us against the enemy. And it was inevitable that before long the co-operation with these allies should give our Russian activities an appearance of being aimed at overthrowing the Bolshevik Government. That was certainly not their original intention.

\* *ibid.*, pp. 654 and 655.



For a time we hoped that the Soviet Government, which obviously could not wish to see the Germans penetrating into Siberia, might extend to us an invitation to send an Inter-Allied force through Vladivostock to hold them back. For this reason we decided, in April, to give instructions that Ataman Semenov, an anti-Bolshevik leader in Eastern Siberia, who had been encouraged by the Japanese to campaign against the Bolshevik movement there, should be told to hold his hand, and we persuaded the Japanese to adopt the same course. But the Bolsheviks did not invite us to help them, and Semenov continued his progress. A despatch from the Japanese Government dated May 19th, 1918, outlined the situation there as follows:—

“Some time ago the British Government made a proposal to the Imperial Government looking to an intervention in Siberia which they deemed necessary in order to check the penetration of German influence. Subsequently, however, having regard to the attitude of the American Government in the matter, the British Government are understood to have found it advisable to induce, if possible, the Soviet Government to invite the Allied intervention and instructed Mr. Lockhart to enter upon the negotiations with the Soviet Government on these lines. The recent course of these negotiations is unknown to the Imperial Government, but it is presumed that no concrete result has yet been obtained. On the other hand, the British Government, fearing that the continued support on the part of the Allies of the Semenov detachment whose avowed object is to crush the Bolsheviks, might hinder the progress of the negotiations above referred to, requested the Japanese Government to give also advice to Semenov, with a view to restraining for the time being the advance of his detachment. The desired advice was given to Semenov through a Japanese in touch with him, but it is found impossible to dissuade him from his determination. On the contrary, he is continuing his advance encouraged by the success he has so far achieved over the Bolsheviks, and, thanks to the continuous enlistment of the Cossacks in his detachment, its strength has already reached 5,000 and is growing stronger every day. He is now menacing Kalimuskaya. . . .”

The despatch proceeded to hint that there was little prospect of the Allies being invited by the Soviet Government to aid it against the Germans; that indeed intervention in co-operation with the Soviet would only alienate the anti-German elements in Russia; and that we were morally bound to support Semenov.

Our difficulty still was the negative attitude of President Wilson. His view was that any move to intervene in Russia otherwise than with the approval of the Soviet Government would develop into

ve to displace the Soviet Government in favour of an Imperialist oration. None of us had the least wish to restore Russian rdom. We did however think it essential to re-create an anti-man front in Russia whilst the War lasted. But as regards the estion of intervention in Siberia, we were confronted with the erican suspicion of Japan, and the distrust of her intentions on mainland of Asia, which was not exactly without foundation, as r events have shown. Semenoff came later to be known as the "apanese Puppet," and it is possible that the discouragement which y asserted they had given him on the strength of our request was a very emphatic one.

At an Anglo-French Conference held in London on May 28th, Pichon pressed strongly on behalf of the French that steps should be taken to transport the Czechs forthwith to France. At that time the French were desperately anxious to get every man they could to France to aid their defence against the German offensive. But the difficulty was that there was no shipping available for such an operation. We could only move the Czechs by asking the Japanese to bring them across the Pacific, and then we could only get them to Europe at the cost of an equivalent number of American troops. Even by such means we could not hold out any hope of moving more than 4,500 to 5,000 Czechs to France by mid-September, and there was the possibility that the transfer would interfere with Japan's sending of troops to Siberia. However, the issue was thrashed out at the meeting of the Supreme War Council at Versailles on June 23rd to 3rd, and decided in favour of the French proposal. We agreed to ask the Japanese to assist with tonnage in moving the Czechs unless until their shipping was required for an expedition to Vladivostock. We further agreed as regards Japanese intervention in Siberia, that if they were willing to promise to respect the territorial integrity of Russia, to abstain from taking sides in her internal politics, and to advance as far west as possible for the purpose of countering the Germans, we should make an effort to secure the approval of President Wilson for Japanese intervention.

During May and June it had become increasingly clear that there was no hope of getting the Bolsheviki to co-operate with us in setting up a resistance to German penetration of Russia. For that purpose, our only potential allies were the anti-Bolshevik groups which controlled various parts of the dislocated empire. A party of Czechs fought their way through to Vladivostock, which they captured on June 29th, after a three hours' battle with the Bolsheviki. They occupied the town, and a pro-Ally Coalition Government was set up there under their protection. Among the prisoners taken by the Czechs were 600 Magyars, a proof that Bolshevik opposition to us was being stiffened by the presence among them of subjects of the Central Powers. On July 10th we decided

to send a battalion from Hong-kong to Vladivostock to support them and we urged the French to move troops there if possible.

Events were thus compelling us to take action on Russian soil and in co-operation with organisations there other than those who were associated with the Soviet authorities of Moscow and Petrograd and without their concurrence. But it was not our business to determine whether the Bolshevik or the anti-Bolshevik sections of the Russian peoples would ultimately dominate the whole Empire. On June 24th, M. Kerensky came to interview me at Downing Street with a view to securing the support of the Allies for the relics of the old Socialist parties which had formed the Provisional Government before their overthrow by Lenin. He claimed that he was speaking "for the whole of Russia except the reactionaries and the Bolsheviks," and said he was supported by the Executive Committee of the Constituent Assembly, which the Bolsheviks had dissolved; the Conference of the Party Leaders of the Socialist Revolutionary and the Popular Socialist Party; the Social Democrats (except Bolsheviks); and the Cadet Party, the party of propertied middle-class reformers. These various parties disagreed with one another, but he asserted that they all agreed in wanting Allied intervention to oust the Germans and the Bolsheviks.

Kerensky was very anxious for an Allied expedition *via* Siberia. A purely Japanese one would be unwelcome, but if all the Allies took part, the Japanese contingent might be as big as it liked. The difficulty I found in discussing the situation with him was that he could get no clear assurance that he represented any organised force, apart from resolutions passed in secret by disgruntled Socialists. Resolutions on paper are of little value against machine-guns, and in the heart of Russia it was the Bolsheviks who had the machine-guns. Kerensky was vague as to how many of his friends and Committees had been left at large in Soviet Russia; he had had no communication with them recently. He expressed the opinion that the Bolsheviks could not deal a heavy blow at these organisations.

"Their power in a military sense was negligible, but they were powerful enough as a police force to deal with a powerless and unorganised population. Large play had been made in the west with the Bolshevik experiments in the creation of the Red Guard, compulsory military service and so forth, but in practice these measures produced no results. He said that the influence of the Bolsheviks was waning. . . ."

It seemed to me that Kerensky was underestimating the strength of the Bolsheviks, and overestimating that of the chattering committees he represented. I told him that:—

"If there were any elements in Russia which were prepared



ought Germany, the Allies would give them all the help in their power.

M. Kerensky said that he had come to say that in the event of Allied intervention there would be no opposition. It was essential, however, that he should know what were the intentions of the Allies and what he and his friends could expect. If the Allies were willing to help it would be necessary for further conversations to take place in regard to military, economic and other preparations in Russia itself."

The proposal for "further conversations" sounded rather ominous to me. I saw a prospect of any practical measures in Russia being postponed to the end of a far vista of negotiations and discussions. So I passed my visitor over to Mr. Philip Kerr (now Lord Lothian) for a further examination of his proposals. Kerr's report of this further interview showed that Kerensky's real object was to get the Allies to recognise him and his exiled friends as the real government of Russia, and to guarantee to put them in the saddle again. The bait was the fact that they were willing to approve Allied intervention on Russian territory against Germany.

"M. Kerensky said that the essential point he wanted to clear up was as to the attitude which the Allies took towards Russia. The Coalition, which he represented, regarded itself as being the legitimate authority in Russia. The Bolshevik régime was a usurpation which destroyed the Constituent Assembly, partitioned and ruined Russia, and based its authority not on representative institutions, but on autocratic principles. When he and the people for whom he spoke talked about Russia still being in the Alliance, they were not using mere words or indulging in ideals, they were expressing their profoundest convictions. They believed that the continuance of the Alliance between Russia and the Western Allies was essential just as much to the Allies as to Russia itself, because they believed that the reconstruction of Russia as an independent power politically, militarily and economically, was essential to any lasting peace. The Allies must look for their friends among the Liberal parties for whom he spoke. They would get no real support either from the Bolsheviks or the reactionaries. The only real policy was to continue on the lines of the old alliance."

It was evident that Kerensky's purpose and that of the Allies were identical. Our one concern was to prevent the vast and productive area of the Russian Empire from becoming subject to the Central Powers, and a source of supply for them in the War. It was our business to decide whether the Russians preferred to be led by Lenin or by Kerensky. Kerensky, on the other hand, was

chiefly concerned to secure our undertaking to regard him and his friends as "the legitimate Government of Russia." About the extent to which, if at all, he and his friends could rally military forces to fight with the Allies against the Germans, he was extremely vague and non-committal. On the whole, I gathered that there was little of a practical and material nature which he and his Social colleagues were in a position to achieve at that stage, either to establish their own authority in Russia or to resist the German advance. So far as the latter object was concerned, our best hope lay in the warlike Cossacks, reinforced by the Czech Legion and such forces as the Japanese and ourselves could throw into Siberia.

We had for some time been considering the advisability of sending General Knox out to Siberia to examine the situation on the spot and to take counsel with the pro-Ally Russians. On May 30th we had decided to sound Lord Reading as to whether it would be desirable for the General to travel *via* Washington and talk over the Russian situation with President Wilson. But Wilson had got it into his head that Knox, being strongly anti-Bolshevik, would work for the restoration of Czardom, and he not only did not want to see him, but he disliked the idea of Knox travelling across the United States upon such a mission!

In mid-July, when we had definitely decided to send General Knox to Vladivostock, we received a message from Lord Reading strongly deprecating the idea of Knox going *via* America, on account of the state of opinion there. We discussed the matter in the War Cabinet on July 16th, and decided that the General should proceed forthwith to Vladivostock, but should be told not to go to Washington nor grant any interviews on the way. Lord Reading should have informed that Knox was being sent to act as head of a British Military Mission co-operating with the Allied Headquarters which would be formed at Vladivostock—a post for which he possessed exceptional qualifications. In a memorandum which he gave me the same day, Mr. Balfour pointed out the absurdity of the American attitude.

"The fact is that an autocratic system is not only repulsive to Englishmen of all shades of opinion, but that the re-establishment of the Russian autocracy would, so far as I can judge, be a misfortune for the British Empire. Autocracy and militarism naturally go together; and it is almost inconceivable that, if a Czar could be re-established, Russia would not again become a purely military Empire. If so, she would inevitably be a danger to her neighbours; and to none of her neighbours so much as to ourselves. . . .

In my opinion, moreover, a restored Czardom would be more dangerous to British interests than the Czardom which has just

vanished; for it would almost certainly be dependent upon Germany. . . . If I am right, Russian autocracy, always in danger at home, would have to look for support to its autocratic neighbour in Germany. If the German autocracy survives both the War and the political agitation which will succeed the War, it is very difficult to believe that it will not thus control the policy of the Russian Empire. . . .

It is of course perfectly true that, however strong and genuine be our desire to keep out of Russian politics, it will probably be in practice almost impossible to prevent intervention having some (perhaps a great) effect on Russian Parties. The intervening Force must necessarily work with those who are prepared to work with it. Indirectly it will strengthen the Parties who are prepared to fight the Germans. It will directly injure the Parties which turn to Germany for assistance. We can do no more than attempt to the best of our ability to keep aloof from these internal divisions, and to give full opportunity to the Russian people to determine the future of their country."

I sent Mr. Balfour's minute to Lord Reading to help him to explain the situation to President Wilson. With it I sent him a private note pointing out that General Knox was not a politician, and had been very unpopular with the old régime in Russia because of his criticism of their methods; that he was wholly concerned with the military situation in the East, and was therefore the best man to deal with the military aspects of the Siberian question. We ourselves were far from sympathising with reaction in Russia, and had been careful from the beginning of the year to maintain relations with the Bolsheviks. I added that the real security against reaction in Russia was the President himself. If he joined in the intervention in Siberia, he could dominate its developments, for the rest of us, apart from Japan, were too much preoccupied in the West to give much attention. If, finally, Wilson was ready to send an important political mission to Siberia, I would certainly see that a Liberal or Labour representative from this country accompanied it.

At a meeting of the Supreme War Council at Versailles, held on July 2nd, a long memorandum to President Wilson had been adopted, setting out the situation in Siberia, and the reasons which led us to urge intervention there. It ended with an appeal to the President to approve the policy we were recommending and thus enable it to be carried into effect before it was too late.

It was not until the end of July that President Wilson finally decided to approve the scheme for joint intervention in Siberia. Even then he seems to have quite misunderstood the scale of effort which would be necessary to achieve any result. The arrangement which he gave his consent was that the British and Americans



should each send 7,000 troops, and that the Japanese, supported by the presence of these contingents, should furnish a force capable of advancing to rescue the Czecho-Slovaks who were still in Siberia, holding out near Lake Baikal; and while Wilson suggested that a Japanese contingent equal to the American in size would be enough, the French and ourselves recognised that a far larger force would be required. The difference of opinion was surmounted in a curious fashion. The American contingent turned out, with all its ample subsidiary services, to be nearer 9,000 than 7,000; and the Japanese promptly made this an excuse for increasing their own contingent. In the end, the troops landed by the Japanese at Vladivostok totalled over 70,000. Our combined forces, supported by a Russian Army gathered by General Knox, gave us a hold upon the whole of Siberia. When the armistice was signed on November 11th, 1918, a curious miscellany of troops was holding a picket line right across Siberia along the route of the Trans-Siberian railway, up to the Ural Mountains. It included White Russians, Czechs, British naval and military units, Japanese, Americans, and small bodies of French and Italians. Its positive value was that it prevented any German penetration of Siberia, and served as a barrier against their establishing any predominance there which they might utilise after the War. As events turned out, the final collapse of the Central Powers was so complete that the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk became scrap-paper, and the ambitious programme of expansion eastwards which Germany had envisaged came to nothing. No claim materialised under the insurance policy, and critics could assert, wise after the event, that it was a needless expense. That is true of most insurances. But in the spring of 1918, when the issue of the War was in doubt, it was eminently prudent to do everything possible to prevent German exploitation of the immense resources of Russia and Siberia, and her imperial expansion over their territories.

#### 4. THE CASPIAN

There was a third area of Russian territory where, after the collapse of Russia and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, we found it necessary to intervene in order to hold the Central Powers in check and prevent them from securing valuable supplies. This was in the south, around the Caspian, where were the oil-wells of Baku.

When the Russian Army under Judenitch disintegrated, and the road to that valuable region lay open, both the Germans and the Turks began to race for it. Our concern was to prevent either of them from winning. During April, May and June, 1918, the Turks were thrusting up through Armenia and North-Western Persia into Georgia, while the Germans were pushing eastwards across the Ukraine in the same direction. In April, the Turks occupied Baku, and on June 8th the independent government of Georgia signed

ace with Germany and Turkey. Thereupon the Germans sent a force across the Black sea, which on June 12th occupied Tiflis. Meantime we had not been idle. On January 27th, 1918, a mission had been dispatched from Baghdad, from our army in Mesopotamia, to carry out famine relief in North Persia and keep open the route between Baghdad and the Caspian. It was in charge of General Dunsterville—the erstwhile “Stalky” of Kipling’s schoolboy tales. On February 17th, Dunsterville’s Mission reached Baku, on the southern shore of the Caspian. In the following months he carried on relief work in North Persia, making his headquarters at Kasvin, and holding the region against Turkish and Bolshevik agents.

The German and Turkish invasion of Georgia roused nationalist sentiment there, and on July 26th the Bolshevik Government at Baku was overthrown by a *coup d’état* and the new administration appealed to Dunsterville for aid, sending transports to ship them to the Caspian. Dunsterville set to work to organise the local levies, but they proved to be poor material. The Turks launched an attack on Baku on August 26th, which was beaten off by our troops. They then invested the town, and eventually, on the night of September 15th, Dunsterville and his forces evacuated Baku and retired to Baku. The expedition had served the purpose of keeping the oil wells of Baku out of reach of the Central Powers at a critical period of the War, and it was now too late for the enemy to make any use of them. Six weeks later, Turkey was out of the War.

The concluding chapters of the story of the Allied intervention in Russian territory belong to the post-War period of history. The peril against which they were originally directed vanished with the final collapse of all the enemy powers on all fronts, east and west, before the end of 1918. Thereafter it became only a question of how far we should continue to give help to those allies in Russia whose cooperation with us against Germany had lately been so welcome. When it became clear that their bid for power was doomed to failure, and that the choice of the Russian people was definitely swinging across to support a Bolshevik régime, our withdrawal was inevitable. That, however, is another story. As parts of the military effort of the Allies during the Great War, the expeditions to Murmansk and Archangel, to Siberia, and to the Caucasus, played their part in maintaining opposition to what at one time appeared to be a very real and terrible danger of Prussian imperial expansion in Russia and across Asia. They barred the road to the Arctic and the Pacific oceans, to the cornfields of Southern Russia, to the minerals of Siberia and the oil of the Caspian. They enabled us to bring to safety scores of thousands of Czecho-Slovaks and Serbians, and a large number of refugees stranded in a country where law and order had temporarily vanished.

## CHAPTER LXXXIV

### DAWN BREAKS IN THE EAST

DURING the spring and summer months of 1918 such a colossal struggle for final mastery was raging on the Western Front in France and Flanders that other theatres of war were almost completely overlooked by the principals in this tremendous conflict, being only considered as a source of reinforcement for the great battles in the West. Every great Entente general had predicted the continuation of the War into 1919 and the Governments were enjoined to prepare a sufficiency of men and mechanism lest the War continue into 1920. Nevertheless the events in those forgotten and despised theatres in the East brought War to an end in 1918; but for them it might have dragged its bloody course into the spring and summer of 1919.

In all these theatres the situation was favourable for a decisive blow by the Allies, and had it been delivered earlier the collapse would have come all the sooner.

The Turks were tired, disheartened and disorganised. Desertion had thinned down their forces almost to vanishing point. There were no units of any consequence threatening General Marshall in Mesopotamia, although the collapse of the Russian Armies on the right, the general unrest in Persia and the length of his communications limited his power of pressing an offensive with the forces at his disposal. In Palestine, although the Turkish troops still put up resistance to us in various minor frays and skirmishes, they had dwindled to a miserable remnant, scourged by disease, "hungry, ragged, verminous, comfortless, hopeless, outnumbered."\* On the Salonika Front the Bulgarians had lost interest in the War and were longing to get back to their fields. In Italy the Austrian forces were dispirited by the hunger and war-weariness that ravaged their home front. They launched one flaccid offensive, in June, on the Piave, but when it failed the front relapsed into quiescence until the final Italian offensive in October.

I have elsewhere indicated how the Bulgarian collapse precipitated the German surrender and made unnecessary another year's campaign, though this had been anticipated by all the great leaders

\* "Official History: Military Operations, Egypt and Palestine," Vol. II, p. 446



the Allied Armies, by Pétain throughout, by Foch in July after the great German defeat in Champagne, by Haig as late as October. All Westerners closed their minds to the possibilities of the eastern theatres. One can understand the French taking that view. The enemy was within cannon fire of their capital. But it is less comprehensible that our own military leaders and advisers should have succeeded in maintaining so limited and shortsighted an outlook. It was quite contrary to all the great military and naval traditions that built up our Empire. But we all remember how every little success in France or Belgium was magnified and how real great victories won by the Allies elsewhere were relegated to smaller print and less conspicuous headlines. The smallest advance on the West was blazoned forth as a great victory. The striking victories won by the Serbians in 1914 were barely recorded. The battles won by Brusiloff with hundreds of thousands of prisoners did not attract the same notice as a kilometre's advance with a few thousands of prisoners in the West.

The Reichstag Commission of Enquiry, set up after the War to investigate the causes of the military collapse of Germany in 1918, came, after exhaustive researches, to the conclusion that:—

“The War was lost in a military sense when, during the retirement of the German Western Front in September, 1918, the collapse of Bulgaria, which was followed by that of Austria-Hungary, completely changed the situation of the German Army in the field. From then on, every attempt to obtain peace by purely military means was obviously vain.”\*

I have already quoted Ludendorff's statement that when he and Hindenburg heard of the Bulgarian débâcle they came to the conclusion that they also must apply for an armistice. They knew then that the game was up.

#### SALONIKA

Of all the “side-shows,” the most important turned out to be that of the despised Salonika Front. Here it was that the deadly thrust was delivered against the Central Powers which crumpled their resistance and finally compelled them to abandon hope of continuing the War. The Balkans are the back door of Central Europe, and when it had been forced, the end was in sight.

Allied policy in the Balkans throughout the earlier part of the war was marked by a singular lack of prevision or common sense. We refused Greek help when it was proffered to us at the beginning of the War and when Greek troops could have occupied and held the Gallipoli Peninsula and placed Constantinople at the mercy of our arms. “Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918,” Reichstag Report, Vol. I, p. 23.

Fleet. They could also have held Bulgaria in check. We failed to support Serbia at the outset, when we could have saved that country from devastation and turned it into a corridor for Allied attack upon Austria. Then, too late, we planted an expeditionary force at Salonika, too small to carry out serious offensives against the enemy, yet unduly large for mere garrison and defence purposes. We failed to keep Bulgaria from joining in with the enemy, and for a long time we so muddled our relations with Greece that instead of being our ally she was a peril in our rear. In June, 1917, we compelled King Constantine to abdicate, and thereupon Greece, under the rule of M. Venizelos, joined in on our side. This meant that the Greek Army was available to strengthen our forces in the Balkans, and Venizelos offered to contribute 12 divisions—nine of them by the end of 1917—provided the Entente could supply the necessary equipment, heavy guns, etc. Unfortunately, General Sarrail, who was in charge of the Allied forces there, was by no means in favour with his authorities at home, and as a result his efforts to get material and food for the Greeks were muddled, neglected and brought to naught. At a conference of the Supreme War Council on December 1st, 1917, we learnt from M. Venizelos that his inability to redeem his promise of raising 12 divisions was due to the failure of the French to provide what had been promised. The result was that only three divisions had so far been mobilised, and even these were short of heavy guns and other equipment. It was not possible to call up more men until they could be fed and equipped. As soon as the attention of the Supreme Council was called to this stupid neglect, the Governments concerned put it right, but meanwhile six months had been lost.

The French Government recalled General Sarrail before the end of December, replacing him by General Guillaumat. He was instructed to complete his defensive arrangements for the Balkan Front, and to study the possibility of an offensive. The change had long become inevitable, for General Sarrail, although a man of considerable ability and charm, had rather gone to pieces as a commander of an Inter-Allied force. He was more interested in politics than in his own business, which he completely neglected. His passion for political intrigue led him to meddle in Near East politics and provoked continual trouble with the Greeks. It had been largely responsible for creating the unsatisfactory tangle which we ultimately cut by deposing King Constantine. A more tactful General might have handled the situation without driving the King into open hostility. Reports on the situation which were demanded from him were not forthcoming. As far back as June 6th, 1917, I had reluctantly found it necessary to write to M. Ribot begging him to appoint another General in place of Sarrail and to supersede him without delay. The letter was as follows:—

“6th June, 1917.

My dear M. Ribot,

The War Cabinet have been deeply concerned by a number of serious reports which they have received about the recent offensive operations on the Salonika Front—reports which reflect very gravely on the fitness of General Sarrail for the command-in-chief of the great force which is there.

It has been part of the Allied strategy that early this spring offensive operations should be undertaken upon the Salonika Front, and so far as we can ascertain it was generally agreed among all competent judges upon the spot that with proper leadership there was an excellent opportunity of dealing a heavy blow at the enemy. Yet the operations appear to have been a complete fiasco.

According to the reports which we have received from our representatives, the result was due to no want of courage or determination on the part of the troops engaged, but entirely to failure on the part of the higher command. There does not appear to have been any properly concerted plan of campaign, or any proper contact between General Sarrail and the armies under his command; the offensives seem to have consisted of a number of isolated operations, neither properly co-ordinated nor adequately supported, and to have been conducted without any attempt to press home the advantages gained.

The War Cabinet find that these reports are fully borne out by the information which they have received from the Italians, the Russians, and the Serbs. It would further seem from these reports that General Sarrail, after more than a year and a half in command, has entirely lost the confidence of the Allied troops entrusted to his care.

In these circumstances, the War Cabinet have come to the conclusion that they are not justified in continuing to leave the very large British forces in the Balkans under General Sarrail's command.

Speaking for myself, I must say that it is with the deepest regret I write in this sense. As you know, I have by no means been an opponent of General Sarrail. I was favourably impressed by him when we met in Rome, and I have on more than one occasion defended him in order that he might have every chance of carrying out the policy which was then agreed upon. And I wish to recognise without reserve the loyalty with which he has observed the pledges which he gave. But after reading the reports we have received, and making full further inquiries, I entirely concur with the War Cabinet that we should not be justified in leaving the British forces in the Balkans under the supreme command of General Sarrail.



We sincerely hope that the French Government will recognize the necessity for the appointment of another General in place of General Sarrail, and will issue immediate instructions to some competent officer on the spot to take over the command until the new Commander-in-Chief can arrive.

Yours sincerely,

D. LLOYD GEORGE."

Soon after the receipt of this letter Ribot resigned and was followed by Painlevé, who was deeply attached to General Sarrail, and was convinced that the opposition to him in French military circles was purely political in its origin.

But when Clemenceau took office our request was renewed and he promptly acted upon it.

While the change in the command gave a prospect of greater harmony and efficiency in the Salonika expeditionary forces, it did not carry with it any prospect of renewed offensive activities there. On the contrary, the position in Macedonia in December, 1917, and for the first half of 1918, so far as it was known to the Supreme War Council, seemed to put any serious offensive out of the question. We had taken advantage of the entry of the Greeks into the War on our side to withdraw two of our divisions for use in Egypt and Palestine. According to a statement made by the D.M.O. to the War Cabinet on December 12th, 1917, the total rifle strength of the Allies in Macedonia, including British, French, Serbians and Greeks, was 160,000, while that of the Bulgarians and Germans opposed to us was 203,000 rifles. This meant that we were compelled to stand carefully on the defensive.

The fact was that our Balkan force, which eventually was destined to give a dramatic *coup de grâce* to the enemy, remained until the second half of 1918 a miserable Cinderella among the Allied Armies. The British War Office never loved it. The British Official History retails a wretched story of neglect, delay and official bungling in relation to its essential supplies, which quite unnecessarily aggravated its sufferings from malaria and impeded effective action. As I have elsewhere related, it owed its existence more to diplomatic necessities than to the foresight of the military. The expedition was launched, not to defeat the enemy but to rescue the remains of the Serbian Army, and prevent the whole of the Balkan, including Greece, from becoming an Austro-German province. The French Government were the prime movers, with the more hesitant agreement of our own Government, and the recurrent illwill of our military authorities, who again and again urged our complete withdrawal from Salonika to concentrate all our troops on the Western Front on elaborate offensives which brought us nothing but immense casualties.

M. Clemenceau, who became French Premier on November 16th, 1917, was also unsympathetic to the Salonika expedition, and in the following months the French troops there had their share of neglect. On January 25th, 1918, it was reported to us by the D.M.O. that the French forces in Salonika were short of supplies and suffering from hunger—a condition which did not apply to the Italian or British troops. They were also 28,000 men below strength. Another weakness to the force was occasioned by the fact that it included a Russian division, and by February, 1918, this unit could no longer be trusted to hold its part of the line, and had to be withdrawn, its front being taken over by the British. The Russians were used for non-combatant work behind the line, but on March 12th it was reported to the War Cabinet that they would have to be withdrawn altogether, as they were attempting to corrupt the Serbians, and there was a danger that they might also demoralise the Greeks.

When the Germans broke through the Western Front in March, and we were scraping together all the reserves we could muster to reinforce our line, the idea of bringing back men from Salonika was considered. However, it was decided that:—

“None of the four British divisions (with one brigade) in the Salonika theatre, should be brought to France, since, although up to strength numerically, they were weakened by malaria.”

The further German offensive on the Lys caused this question to be reopened, and the army authorities debated whether to bring back two divisions, but abandoned the idea in the face of French protests. Then, at the meeting of the Supreme War Council on May 2nd, I advanced the suggestion that as these divisions were still in good condition, we might reduce them to a nine-battalion basis, and bring the surplus battalions to France. Clemenceau was agreeable to our replacing British by Indian battalions, and substituting Greek for French troops at Salonika, provided General Guillaumat thought it could be done; and eventually we decided that a French and a British General Officer should be sent to examine the situation with Guillaumat. The War Office chose Lieutenant-General Sir C. L. Colcombe for this task, and he was sent out on May 15th. On May 25th he reported that the French were withdrawing 12,000 troops from Salonika to France. It struck me as a rather curious proceeding to remove these troops without a word to us, when at the Supreme War Council at Abbeville they had strongly protested against our withdrawing troops. However, instead of urging a protest against this, the C.I.G.S. suggested that it would serve as an excuse for our replacing some of our battalions there with Indian troops, bringing the British units to the Western Front. There was not at this time any idea of passing over to the offensive on the Salonika Front. Hitherto our safety in the Balkans depended less upon the

efficiency with which the Allied forces there were maintained and commanded, than upon the reluctance of the Bulgarians to embark upon an offensive in which they were bound to suffer hard knocks for the dubious privilege of overrunning territory which they had no prospect of being able to retain permanently. General Guillaumat, on replacing General Sarraill, had been specifically instructed to prepare and submit plans for the defence of the front including the possible carrying out of a retirement if attacked by force. At the meeting of the Supreme War Council, on March 15th, I complained that these plans were not yet forthcoming. I was told they were then on their way, and would be communicated to the Military Representatives at Versailles on arrival. On June 12th, the War Cabinet was informed by our Military Representative, General Sackville-West, that no proper plans had been received, and his complaint that the situation in regard to Allied defensive policy in the Balkans was not on a satisfactory footing was strongly endorsed by the C.I.G.S. who said that:—

“General Guillaumat had been repeatedly asked for his plan in the event of a retirement, but so far they had not been obtained. If (as there was reason to believe) there were no proper plans, it was quite possible that there might be a bad disaster to our troops in that theatre of war.”

The C.I.G.S. further informed us that Clemenceau was recalling Guillaumat, and sending out General Franchet d'Esperey in his place.

The change in the Balkan Command coincided with a considerable change in the military outlook. The Germans, exhausted by the repeated offensive in the West, were driven to withdraw the bulk of their forces from the Balkan Front, leaving it to be held by the Bulgarians who had by now grown weary of a war to serve Austrian and German ambitions in the Balkans. The Bulgarians were hungry too, for Germany had stripped them of all the foodstuffs she could collect to feed her own starving people; their armies were running out of equipment, and Germany had stopped subsidising the treasury. On the Allied side, the flow of American reinforcements to France made it no longer necessary to contemplate withdrawing troops from Salonika. The Greek Armies had now been mobilised and equipped, and had tested their own prowess in a short but successful local offensive on a seven and a half mile front at the Skra di Legen, west of the Vardar, where on May 30th they pushed forward one and a quarter miles and took 2,000 prisoners. This victory opened the eyes of the Entente Governments to the possibilities of the Balkans. It proved that the Greek troops raised by Venizelos possessed a high fighting value and could be depended upon in the event of an offensive being undertaken. It also proved



that the Bulgarians were not fighting with the spirit they displayed in 1915 and 1916. General Franchet d'Esperey—a very competent soldier—came to the conclusion that the situation was favourable for a great offensive on that front. The question was discussed at a meeting of the Supreme War Council in July and it was decided to refer the desirability of an offensive to the Military Representatives for their consideration and advice. By this date Clemenceau, who had been an opponent of the “side-shows,” was converted to the idea of an offensive in the Balkans and was pressing for it. This was all the more remarkable because he had been a consistent opponent of the Salonika Expedition. As he himself put it during the discussions at this Council meeting:—

“He himself, from the commencement had been wholly against any Balkan expedition. He had never believed that an offensive would give satisfactory results. Could he then be accused of wishing to start a grand offensive in the Balkans? So utterly opposed was he to any such proposals that, at one time, he had suggested withdrawing the whole of the troops from Salonika.”

For the moment, pending a report by the Military Representatives, the only operation conducted on the Balkan Front was an advance by the Italians in Albania.

On September 4th, General Guillaumat, who was now back in France after handing over the Balkan Command to General Franchet d'Esperey, came over to Downing Street for a Conference upon the matter of a Balkan offensive. He gave an account very much at variance with the reports we had received from the War Office as to the condition and outlook of the Allied Armies on the Macedonian Front:—

“When I took over the command at Salonika in December, 1917, I left Paris under the impression that I should realise great difficulties with an army which was inferior to that of our enemies. I was soon convinced that this impression was not correct. I was much struck to find at Salonika a force so strong and so well provided with equipment, and I was still more astonished that this force had been left for so long in idleness. The British troops, especially, were the finest I had ever seen in my life, better even than those I had met on the Somme. The French troops were good and complete in all respects. The Serbian Army had some very good soldiers, and the Italians were equally well supplied with men and material. The same holds good to-day, and I may say at once that I consider there is no serious danger to be incurred. What is now necessary is to consider how best to utilise these forces. The situation has been further improved by the mobilisation of the Greek Army. At the end of 1917 there were only three divisions

of the National Defence, which were formed by the Provisional Government, but since that M. Venizelos, at the head of the Athens Government, has increased this force to nine divisions."

The contrast between this highly optimistic account of the efficiency of the Salonika Army and the statements made to the Cabinet as to divisions so weakened from malaria as to be unfit for transport is only one out of many illustrations afforded during the War of the difficulty of obtaining reliable information as to conditions which were easily ascertainable, whenever the War Office thought it desirable to withhold the truth from the Government.

General Guillaumat's description of the Salonika forces was completely justified by the smashing success of the Balkan offensive later in the month. We experienced the same methods of overestimating enemy prowess and understating Allied strength in the Turkish campaign. Our military advisers, in their dislike of "side-shows" and their eagerness to concentrate all efforts on the Western Front, misled their Governments as to the possibilities in these theatres. The nine Greek divisions could have been there by the end of 1917 if the War Office had provided equipment for them more promptly, as I have already noted in an earlier chapter. And thus reinforced, we might have been smashing up the enemy front from the south-east at a time when the only advice we received was to the effect that we must confine ourselves there to a timorous defence, and to making careful plans for a retreat and the possible abandonment of Salonika. Such a blow by us in the Balkans would have had a most disconcerting effect upon the German strategy in the West. To save their Bulgarian allies from disaster they would have been obliged to divert several divisions to the Balkans.

I questioned and cross-questioned Guillaumat very thoroughly on the situation with a view to elucidating the real facts as to the condition and equipment of the Coalition Armies and also as to the numbers and morale of the Bulgarians. I then withdrew into another room with Lord Robert Cecil and Sir Henry Wilson, the C.I.G.S., to consider our decision. Wilson was still doubtful. His comment on Guillaumat's proposition for an offensive was: —

"He makes this proposal for three reasons: namely, to give the Bulgars a good tap; to put the Greek Army on its feet, and thereby to release a certain number of French and English troops, all with the off-chance of something good. His scheme is somewhat sketchy; for instance, that of putting six Serbian and two French divisions on a front of 14 kilometres; but we shall not go in until after the Serbian success. If the Serbian attack is unsuccessful, there will be no attempt to recover on us."

Wilson was always an ultra-Westerner and this was the utterance

a man who frankly did not expect any good to come from Macedonia. That this was, even in September, 1918, the opinion of the Government's military advisers, explains why it was that in spite of my long-held belief in the desirability of attacking the enemy where he was weakest, I had been unable hitherto to secure their support for any operations on this front. Now, however, I had the evidence of a French General who was thoroughly acquainted with the facts, and I was determined to press for an attack. Coming back to the Conference, I gave the consent of the British Government for the offensive. I recommended that the Italians should be urged to launch a simultaneous attack on their front against Austria, but I said that the Macedonian attack must on no account be postponed whilst waiting to secure Italian co-operation. The plan communicated by General Guillaumat for a forward movement in the Balkans, starting on the September 15th, was to be carried out by an attack all along the line.

When we launched our offensive Ludendorff diverted to Serbia the Alpine Corps from the Western Front, two divisions from the Italian Front, one from the Ukraine, and three German divisions from the East which had been released for service in the West and had already begun to move across. But though he thus depleted the actual or potential reinforcements of the Western Front by six or seven divisions, he was unable to save Bulgaria, for his help came too late. The Allied attack was opened on the 15th by the French and the Serbians, on the western sectors of the Salonika Front; and its success was immediate and overwhelming. If the long years of stationary warfare had worn out the Bulgarians and made them long to be getting back to their homes and farms, it had made the Serbians desperate and they were led by one of the ablest Generals of the War. They were ravening to be up and at the foe, and at long last to hack their way back into their own land. Plucky fighters though the Bulgars were, they were in no mood to resist such an onset, and the Serbs went through with resistless valour. The front of attack, which was seven miles long at the outset of the offensive, extended to 15 miles on the second day, and to 25 on the third, by which time the point of furthest advance by the Serbs was 20 miles ahead of the original front line. On September 18th there was a still further extension, when the British and the Greek armies on the right of the front, east of the Vardar River, threw their weight against the Doiran sector of the front, the most firmly held sector of the whole enemy line. It was fiercely contested, but collapsed after four days' fighting, as a result of the retreat of the Bulgars on the rest of the front. Meantime the Serbians had continued their victorious advance further west. Across broken, mountainous country which military opinion would have judged hopelessly difficult for rapid movement, they swept on as if it



were an open plain. Their attack had started on September 15th. On September 23rd they had advanced 40 miles and split the Bulgarian Armies beyond repair. The Serbian onslaught on a foe entrenched in the fastnesses above them is one of the most brilliant feats in the War. By the 26th the Bulgarian Commander-in-Chief was appealing for a truce and peace terms. Three days later Bulgarian plenipotentiaries accepted drastic armistice terms dictated by Franchet d'Esperey at Salonika, and on the 30th these were ratified by the Allied Governments and hostilities ceased. During the first half of October, while the Italians pressed forward in Albania, the Serbs were racing back across their own country, clearing out any lingering pockets of Austrian and German troops still garrisoning it, and by the 19th they had reached the banks of the Danube. Therewith the Allies were on that great waterway by which supplies were borne to the enemy from Roumania and the Black Sea. Had we gone there in 1914 or 1915, when the road was still wide open to us, instead of in October, 1918, the War would have been shortened by years. On 19 November the Serbians re-established themselves in Belgrade; and on the same day Hungary revolted from her Austro-German allies and set up an independent Government at Budapest.

Ludendorff records that on the evening of September 28th, the day that the Bulgarian envoys reached Salonika, Hindenburg and he decided that immediate steps must be taken to ask for an armistice and terms of peace. Next day he instructed the German Foreign Secretary to take the necessary steps to this end; and on the morning of September 30th he issued a *communiqué* to the German military representatives at Headquarters which began: —

"Events in Bulgaria have taken Main Headquarters by surprise. The Bulgarian Army has collapsed. Armistice concluded to-day. . . .

Events in Bulgaria and their consequences, the strain on the Western Front with no prospect of any improvement, the impossibility of restoring the situation by an offensive have convinced the Field-Marshal and myself that in the interests of the Army it is necessary that hostilities should end."\*

Apart from the fact that the road to Vienna and the Danube was now opened to the victorious Allies, there was the certainty that Roumania would fall into Allied hands. This would deprive Germany of her oil supplies and thus completely cripple her military activities.

General von Kuhl, one of the ablest of the German Staff Officers in the War, stated in the course of his evidence before the Reichstag Commission: —

\* Ludendorff: "The General Staff and Its Problems," Vol. II, pp. 614 and 615.

"After the collapse of Bulgaria on 3rd October, 1918, the question was raised by the General Staff: 'If to-day Roumania falls away, how long can we last out with petrol? Will the collapse of Roumania compel us at once to abandon hostilities?' The outcome of the discussion was as follows:—

'Aircraft can maintain their full activity for roughly two months (one month's service at the front, one month's service at home). Then they will be completely immobilised.

Motor vehicles can maintain their full activity for roughly two months (one month's service at the front, one month's service at home). Then they will have to cut down to half service.

Lubricating oil is available for six months. Then all machines will be brought to a standstill. . . .

The illuminating oil industry (i.e. provision of petroleum for the civil population, agriculture which is very important) will collapse in one to two months. . . .'

In a session held under the presidency of the Reichs-Chancellor on October 17th, 1918, the Minister of War, Scheüch, explained that we could carry on the War for another month and a half, if Roumania were no longer at our disposal. . . .'\*

One can understand why Hindenburg and Ludendorff regarded the defeat of Bulgaria as bringing all hope of further resistance to an end. Even with the help of Roumanian oil the Germans experienced great difficulties in the matter of transport. If we had taken steps to secure the Balkans in 1915 as we ought to have done, this failure of oil supplies would have shortened the War by at least two years.

Von Kuhl also cites evidence to show that the food supplies from Roumania were of vital importance, and justified the attention there of German forces despite the shortage of man-power in the West. The same was true of the Ukraine food supplies. These, after much difficulty and frequent setbacks, had just been organised satisfactorily when the collapse of Turkey, Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary severed the communications between Germany and that source of supply.

#### THE TURKISH COLLAPSE

No less spectacular than the Balkan campaign, if perhaps less fatal at this stage for bringing the War to an end, was the British victory over the Turks in Syria. Had it come three or even two years earlier, while Russia was still an active belligerent, its effect in opening the Dardanelles to the Allied Fleets would have enabled us not only to supply the Russian Armies on a scale impossible

\* "Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918," Vol. III, pp. 12 and 13.

through her Arctic or Pacific ports, but to make full use of Roumania's adhesion to the Allied cause, eliminating Bulgaria and turning the whole of the Balkans into an Allied bastion. In the autumn of 1918 the collapse of Turkey was a part of the general debacle of the Central Powers and their allies. It contributed to the general feeling in Germany and Austria that they were being isolated and would soon be encircled and invaded from the south.

Our twofold campaign against the Turk, in Palestine and in Mesopotamia, had reached a period by the end of 1917 with the capture of Jerusalem and Baghdad and the consolidation of our dominion over the regions around them. In Mesopotamia there was thereafter a practical cessation of active military operations apart from the dispatch of a force to the Caspian, until the latter part of October, when we advanced on Mosul. Local advances were made by the Mesopotamia force in the early summer of 1918, and some thousands of Turkish prisoners captured, but no attempt was then made to carry out a major advance.

This was in accordance with the plan for the war with Turkey recommended by General Smuts, whom the War Cabinet had deputed on January 28th, 1918, to proceed to Egypt, with full powers on our behalf to confer with Generals Allenby and Marshall and other naval and political authorities there about the military situation in the Middle East, and advise us as to the best use and co-ordination of our resources in that quarter. Smuts telegraphed us on February 15th, giving his view that neither force was strong enough for an offensive campaign, and that as the Mesopotamian force was further from Aleppo, it had better stand on the defensive and hand over two divisions and a cavalry brigade to General Allenby to enable him to take the offensive in Palestine. Already the 7th Indian Division had been transferred, and by the beginning of April the 3rd Indian Division was also sent to Allenby; but the Government decided against Smuts' further suggestion of taking the 13th (Western) British Division from Marshall. The Palestine campaign, which had been conducted with a flabbiness and lack of nerve which presented a wretched contrast to the dash and resolution displayed by Maude in Mesopotamia, was now in the hands of a General whose courage, vigour and resolution had transformed the military situation in that theatre. The story is told by a vivid pen in the "Official History" of the campaign. When Allenby arrived the Army was depressed by a sense of futility. The attack of Dobell and Chetwode on Gaza had been the most perfect sample exhibited on either side in any theatre during this Great War of that combination of muddleheadedness, misunderstanding and sheer funk which converts an assured victory into a humiliating defeat. Gaza was "virtually captured" when the order came to withdraw. We had in our possession at the moment of the withdrawal



intercepted wireless messages which showed that the German Commander considered the position hopeless. Dobell alleged that these messages only reached him after the withdrawal had commenced! The defences of Gaza when Chetwode attacked were merely skeleton trenchments and its garrison was heavily outnumbered by our army in men and artillery. It may be said that Allenby had received substantial reinforcements for his troops before he succeeded in capturing Gaza. But so had the Turks. When Allenby attacked in October the garrison had been considerably reinforced in men and guns and the defences had been strengthened by every device of which German engineers were capable. The year 1917 up till the summer was the best moment that could have been chosen for sweeping the Turks out of Palestine. Their Army was undermanned and ill-equipped. The Turkish leaders were taking no interest in Palestine. Their hopes and ambitions were turned in another direction. That opportunity we threw away through lack of nerve. By July, 1917, Falkenhayn had taken charge. He diverted some of the best divisions in the Turkish Army to Palestine. He had a body of specially picked men brought with him from Germany to strengthen and stiffen the Army more specially on the mechanical side. The artillery was improved and abundant ammunition provided. But there was also a change in the British Army. A new Commander had been appointed and he a man of high courage and resolution, and that made all the difference. He raised the spirit of the Army by his presence and the inspiration of his personality. His plans were carefully and skilfully thought out and perfectly carried into operation. He introduced an element of imagination into his tactical arrangements. There is the famous use by which he deceived the enemy into the belief that his first assault would be on Gaza with a feint attack on Beersheba. This was suggested to him by a brilliant young officer called Meinertzhagen who subsequently, at the risk of his life, successfully carried it out. But Allenby had the intelligence to perceive the value of the plan. Great leadership does not consist merely in the invention of schemes but in the selection and execution of the best. Meinertzhagen's device won the battle. Needless to say he never rose in the War above the rank of Colonel. I met him during the Peace Conference and he struck me as being one of the ablest and most successful brains I had met in any army. That was quite sufficient to make him suspect and to hinder his promotion to the higher ranks of his profession.

The orders I gave to Allenby before he started—"Jerusalem by Christmas"—were faithfully carried out. The campaign was to be vigorously prosecuted in 1918.

But the plans for the renewal of the offensive in Palestine were frustrated by events on the Western Front. After the British defeat

in March, Allenby was instructed to send back to France two of his divisions. He dispatched the 52nd (Lowland) Division in April and the 74th at the beginning of May. He was also called on to withdraw altogether 23 British battalions from his remaining divisions which would in due course be replaced by Indian battalions, and to send them to France. This meant that for the moment his force was disorganised, and that he could not undertake a large-scale advance until the replacement troops had arrived and been incorporated in his formations.

In February, Jericho had been captured, and thereafter until early May a series of abortive efforts were made to advance into Transjordan. But from mid-May to early October the hot weather militated against active operations. Time, however, fought for us on this front, for the Turkish Armies were wasting away through desertions and disease. This process had been going on for a long period.\* Allenby used the interval to complete the reorganisation of his army with the new Indian units that had reached it, and to prepare his plans for a big offensive in mid-September. The War Office was unable to promise him any additional troops for this. But as regards comparative fighting strength, he already held a heavy superiority over the enemy in front of him. His difficulties were not so much those of combatant power as of carrying forward communications for the supplies and equipment of a modern army.

Some idea of the condition of the enemy can be gained from a telegram which General Liman von Sanders sent to Enver Pasha on June 16th, to protest against the withdrawal of the German troops for use in the Caucasus. He wrote:—

"After the continuous hard fighting of the last three months and the heavy losses, the strongest Turkish regiments† averaged 350-400 rifles in addition to machine-guns, and many Turkish regiments are weaker.

On the side of the enemy the partial exchange of troops for Indian battalions 800-1,000 strong has increased his numbers and the Indian troops so far engaged have fought well. In infantry the enemy is three or four times superior to us, and in artillery he is far superior. . . ."

On June 20th, Liman von Sanders addressed to Count Bernstorff the German Ambassador at Constantinople, a telegram in which he said:—

\* cf. The Report of the Military Representatives to the Supreme War Council January 1st, 1918. Joint Note No. 12 (Appendix I to Chapter LXXIV: "The Military Position").

† These Turkish regiments each contained two battalions.

‡ Von Sanders: "Five Years in Turkey," p. 241.

"The Turkish troops here cannot hold the front by themselves. Other events have sufficiently demonstrated what will happen when Turkish troops are retreating. Moreover the troops to-day are undernourished, very poorly clothed and wretchedly shod. . . .

The number of Turkish deserters is higher to-day than that of the men under arms. . . . The clothing of my army is so bad that many officers are wearing ragged uniforms and even battalion commanders have to wear tschariks\* in lieu of boots. . . . According to reports of German Officers of the Sixth Army from Irak, which are on file in the Prussian War Ministry, 17,000 men of that army have died of hunger and its consequences, up to April, 1918. . . ."<sup>†</sup>

Later on, von Sanders states that in September, 1918, at the time when our offensive was launched in Palestine, there were some ten infantry divisions between the sea and the Jordan. Eight of these had been in the front line without relief for more than six months.

"Each Turkish division averaged about 1,300 rifles. The strength of the battalion, of which each division had nine, averaged 130-150 rifles. Some battalions had reached a strength of 180, others had been reduced to 100 by sickness and other losses.

The number of desertions had increased alarmingly during the last few weeks. In the Eighth Army they amounted to 1,100 between 15th August and 14th September. The invariable excuse of the men when captured was that they did not get enough to eat, that they had no linen or foot-gear, and that their clothing was in rags."<sup>‡</sup>

With the enemy forces in such a deplorable state, it is clear that Turkey was ripe for the Allied plucking. The remarkable victory which Allenby secured against them was distinguished, not so much as a feat of desperate valour against a redoubtable opponent, but rather as a well-designed and faultlessly executed manoeuvre, yielding the maximum results at the minimum expense.

Allenby's own estimate of the comparative fighting strengths of the Allied and enemy forces when he launched his offensive was:—

British: 12,000 sabres, 57,000 rifles, 540 guns.

Turkish: 3,000 sabres, 26,000 rifles, 370 guns.

Other estimates give both larger and smaller figures for the Turkish strength. But in any case there was a clear preponderance

\* Animal skins tied on with string.

<sup>†</sup> Von Sanders: "Five Years in Turkey," p. 243.

<sup>‡</sup> *ibid.*, p. 270.



on the British side, which Allenby skilfully increased still further on his actual front of attack by carefully camouflaged massing of his troops there, combined with a pretence of assembling troops for assault on another sector.

On September 19th, Allenby launched his great attack, planned with real military skill. His aim was not just to beat back, but to encircle and wipe out the Turkish forces in Palestine. The Battle of Megiddo was a brilliant operation, of a kind supremely satisfactory to a military commander. The available weight was so crushingly applied at successive key points, and the blows so swift and adroitly followed up, that with a minimum of losses on our side the whole of the Turkish forces opposed to us were killed, captured or dispersed. Twelve days after the battle started, Damascus fell into Allenby's hands, and of all the Turkish forces in Palestine, with a ration strength of about 100,000, only a broken rabble of about 17,000 escaped his net and fled northwards. His tale of prisoners amounted to 75,000, while the total battle casualties of his forces were only 5,666.

The pursuit was hotly pressed, and by October 26th, Aleppo had been taken by the Allied forces. Since September 19th, our front had been moved forward 350 miles, and by the capture of Aleppo and the Muslimyia Junction to the north of it we straddled not only the railway running down through Syria and Palestine, but the line passing eastward to Mosul, and on to Baghdad. During the last stage of this advance our defensive force in Mesopotamia made no contribution to victory by starting to advance briskly toward Mosul. But before it could get there the fight was over. On October 30th, Turkey signed an Armistice with the Allies, and on October 31st, hostilities ceased. The Dardanelles were at last open to us; but we no longer needed them, for eleven days later Austria-Hungary laid down arms, to be followed after another week by Germany.

In reviewing this ultimate dramatic success of our arms against Turkey, it is very hard to escape the conclusion that, granted good generalship, we might have attained a similar victory years before. Granted that in 1918 the Turkish Army was becoming very inferior in quality; but our own force was a comparatively small one, of only seven infantry and four cavalry divisions, from which many of the finest units had been withdrawn to reinforce the Western Front and replaced by raw Indian levies that had seen no service. Twenty-two of the Indian battalions were in this condition, as were some of their commanding officers, and the Official History records that they were largely made up of recruits who had done no musketry. When they landed in Egypt they had hardly any signallers, few Lewis gunners, no bombers, and were deficient in a number of other respects, notably in officers who could speak Hindustani. Prior to

the substitution of these for the experienced troops which Allenby sent to France in the spring of 1918—upwards of 60,000 officers and men—our force in the Near East was far more potent than that which ultimately gained so striking and decisive a victory. Had we reinforced our Egyptian Army in 1916 with a few of the men we were wasting by the hundred thousand on the Somme, at a time when the Allies outnumbered the Germans on the Western Front by more than fifty per cent., we might have broken the Turkish power in time to save Roumania, equip Russia, and end the War two years before it finally dragged to its tragic close. In a Turkish campaign our sea communications gave us a decisive advantage over the Central Powers. The railway accommodation was so limited and so broken that Germany could not have reinforced the Turks, however desperate their plight might be. The military advisers who scorned the Palestine campaign as a futile and wasteful "side-show" have a heavy reckoning to settle.

#### ITALY

The survey of those theatres of war which the British War Office regarded as subsidiary would not be complete without a swift glance at Italy. This was the front where, at the Rome Conference at the beginning of 1917, I had urged that a serious effort should be made to deal Austria a blow which would drive her out of the war. Our military leaders had preferred to plan for the Chemin des Dames and Passchendaele. In consequence, the Allies had suffered serious checks and losses in France and left the Italians to the catastrophic defeat of Caporetto. We had been forced to detach considerable forces to Italy, not to help in achieving a victory but in averting the consequences of a defeat. Even at that the French and ourselves utilised in Italy not a quarter as many men as we had lost as casualties in Passchendaele and on the Chemin des Dames.

Thereafter, the Italian Front, seventy miles further back than it had been in 1917, no longer offered so favourable a starting-point for a deadly thrust at the Central Powers, and the Italian Army had by no means recovered from the shattering blow inflicted upon it in November, 1917. Yet it was destined before the end to play its own decisive rôle in the achievement of the Allied triumph by its ultimate defeat of the Austrian Army in the field, which precipitated a revolution in Vienna and the withdrawal of Austria from the War. After the re-establishment of the Italian Front on the line of the Piave at the end of 1917, the Entente had on this front a nominal superiority over the Central Powers. The revised figures supplied to the Man-power Committee showed that in December, 1917, the combined Italian, British and French forces there had a combatant strength of 1,324,000 as against a total Austro-Hungarian and German combatant strength of 915,000. But the Italian figures

were admittedly approximate only, and the Italian Army needed good deal of reorganisation after the debacle of Caporetto. On December 1st, 1917, the Supreme War Council resolved that its Permanent Military advisers should study the immediate situation on the Italian Front from the offensive as well as the defensive point of view. However, winter had then closed down all possibilities of immediate action, and with the approach of the following spring came the menace of a German offensive in France. Two of the five British divisions in Italy were brought back to the Western Front and eventually, in the latter part of April, the Second Italian Army Corps was sent to reinforce the French in the Argonne. The idea of an Italian offensive was abandoned for the time being, and all available resources were concentrated upon the Western Front. Foch, it is true, as soon as he became Commander-in-Chief on the West, had urged the Italians to attack. But the Italians were not willing at that time to embark upon an offensive. They did not feel even yet quite up to an attack and they were also in daily expectation of an Austrian attack which was then being prepared.

The Germans, indeed, demanded sternly of their exhausted and supine ally that she should help their offensive in France by one in Italy, and insisted the more on this when they found to their disgust that Italian troops had been brought to the Western Front to oppose them. The Austrian Army, where so many hostile races were herded together in uneasy fellowship, largely by military domination, was at this time hopelessly riddled by sedition, disaffection and despair. Neither the Czechs, Croats and other Slav troops, nor those drawn from the Trentino, could be relied on not to desert their Imperial master on the battlefield; but the Austrians, the Germans, and the Hungarians, would have been still capable of putting up a stubborn fight had they been well fed. No soldiers can keep up the fighting spirit in cold and comfortless trenches on thin rations. Confident plans were laid by General von Arz for an attack on the Italians, of which he wrote to Hindenburg that he expected it to bring them to the Adige and achieve the military dissolution of Italy. At that time the Austrians had almost their whole army on the Italian Front, as only small forces were now in Russia, Roumania and the Balkans. The attack was launched on June 15th, but it was made without *élan* and after eight days of attack and counter-attack, it ended in complete failure for the Austrians. Lord Cavan urged that the Allied success should be at once followed up with a counter-offensive, but the Italians declared they were too much exhausted by the struggle to risk such a further stroke. The fighting spirit of the Italian Army had not yet been completely restored.

Thereafter the Italian Front remained quiescent until the autumn. An American regiment was sent to reinforce it, and



meeting of the Supreme War Council on July 24th, 1918, when the tide had turned on the Western Front, it was suggested to the Allies that they should now take the offensive. But they argued that the Austrians were still too strong for them to do so. Haunted by the memory of Caporetto, they had lost their nerve so completely that despite the fact that they now held an impressive numerical superiority, they still feared the foe who had once struck them such a blow.

But by mid-October, the course of the War had so changed in favour of the Entente that the Italians could see their enemies tottering, and could pluck up courage to join in the attack. Bulgaria had fallen, and the Allied forces were sweeping towards the Danube. Damascus had fallen, and the British cavalry were racing for Aleppo. On the Western Front we had regained all the Belgian coast, and were thrusting the Germans far back behind the lines they had held since the first year of the War. The Italians agreed to make their contribution, and Foch was able to include an offensive by them in his scheme for the final general advance to victory. In the Battle of Vittorio Veneto they struck down and defeated the Austrian army, the British contingent playing a valiant and vital part in the attack. Thereby they shattered the only remaining element in the Austrian Empire that possessed any vestige of coherence. Their victorious attack was launched on October 24th. After three days the Austrian Government was suing for an armistice. After three more a revolution broke out in Vienna. By November 3rd the Italian forces had occupied Trieste and an armistice was signed. It was a complete surrender, according to the Entente the right to make full use for military purposes of all the ways of communication of the Austrian Empire. By its terms we should have been able to take our armies to the southern frontiers of Germany—a move which would have turned the front of the Rhine, and made any attempt by Germany to stand upon it. But no such move was needed, for a week later Germany herself had laid down her arms.

This was the last of the "side-shows," apart from the strategically important colonial affair of German East Africa. And it is not without significance that all of them, contemned and neglected though they were by the pundits who dictated our military strategy, ended in victory before our triumph on the favoured Western Front. These victories, had they been achieved earlier in the conflict, could have had a critical influence on its further course and have hastened its end. Even as it was, they proved decisive in saving us from a further winter of war. Before the collapse of Bulgaria, Turkey and Austria-Hungary supervened, there was still a prospect that the Germans might hold out into 1919. After her allies had fallen, she had no choice but to surrender out of hand.

## CHAPTER LXXXV

### HOW PEACE CAME

#### 1. GERMANY ASKS FOR TERMS

THE Great War lasted so long because the respective war aims of the two sides were irreconcilable, and neither side was prepared to give way until it was compelled to do so. Blame may be apportioned here or there for the faults or mistakes which led to the outbreak of hostilities, for the pacts, understandings, military arrangements and so on that played their part in letting loose the monster, for the jealousies, fears, acquisitive ambitions of the nations that were drawn into the arena. Once the War started, there were objectives which each country resolved to secure as the reward for its sacrifice. France wanted to recover the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. Italy sought to gain the *Italia Irredenta* of the Trentino and Trieste. The Russian Government wanted Constantinople and the hegemony of the Balkans—though in the latter stages of the War it did not much matter what Russia originally wanted. What she got was the greatest economic Revolution in history. Austria, the culprit that recklessly lit the fire, wanted to dominate Serbia. Germany wanted territorial expansion in the east, and control of the Belgian coast. The young Turks had their Pan-Turanian dreams. Britain, who in fact managed during the War to pick up a number of German colonies that she did not really want, entered the War mainly to defend the integrity of Belgium, and up to the end that was the one issue upon which we were not prepared to compromise. No one who lived through those years can question that for the main stream of public opinion in this island—and public opinion ultimately dominates the actions of Government here to a degree incomprehensible in lands subject to pre-War autocracies and post-War dictatorships—the liberation of Belgium was the aim which brought us unitedly into the War and upheld our resolution until its close.

Belgium became, perhaps especially in the latter phases of the War, a symbol of the clash of two great master purposes which dominated respectively the Allies and the Central Powers. We would not have kept up the War in order to undo the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The conquered German colonies we would have been willing to throw on the conference table as bargaining counters in a peace negotiation. We had pledged France our support for her

covery of Alsace-Lorraine; but had she wearied of the fight and thought the price to pay too heavy, we would have left the decision to her. But so long as we could maintain the struggle, we were resolved not to abandon it without securing the full restoration of Belgium's independence and integrity. And that resolve was as firm among the common people who knew little of high politics as it was among those, more deeply versed in statecraft and history, who knew of the long effort of Britain to keep the Flanders coast from falling into the hands of any powerful, potential enemy.

The restoration of Belgium had become for us symbolic of the insistence on just dealings between nations and the suppressing of ruthless aggression by the strong against the weak. If aggression had been allowed to profit, to hold and keep its booty, it would have been an acknowledgment on the part of Britain either of hopeless defeat or utter dishonour.

On the other hand, the German militarists saw in Belgium a highly valuable trophy, and one which put them in a far more favourable position for challenging Britain on the sea, if we made difficulties of their ambitions as a World Power. The German industrialists saw the advantage of commanding so convenient an outlet to the sea. Until they had finally abandoned all hope of either victory or a stalemate, they clung to their purpose of retaining a grip on Belgium after the War. Although they were quite definitely informed that this was the one matter on which we would consider no compromise, they were careful in all their peace feelers prior to their collapse in the autumn of 1918 to make no unreserved and unqualified promise for the restoration of Belgium independence.

During the latter part of the War, the German High Command dictated Germany's policy. So long therefore as they clung to their Belgian ambitions, the politicians could not make any offer of peace which we would regard even as a basis for negotiation. The German High Command stepped into supreme authority when it successfully insisted on the dismissal of the Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg. Hereafter, all civilian statesmen were its creatures. In the summer of 1918, it secured the dismissal of the Foreign Secretary, von Kühlmann, because he had dared to say publicly to the Reichstag that the War could not be settled by weapons alone, thus hinting at the need to compromise on the ambitions of the German military leaders—Belgium being in his mind. Expansion of the Eastern frontiers of Germany, especially on the Baltic, was also an essential objective of any acceptable peace.

A notorious Memorandum written by Colonel von Haeften on the 3rd, 1918, which Ludendorff forwarded to the Imperial Chancellor with "the strongest possible recommendation," advocated a "Peace Offensive"—not as a sincere effort to secure peace, but to include the enemies of Germany into thinking she was ready to make



peace. This, it was suggested, would rally pacifist sentiment, make war weariness more vocal, and rouse opinion in Britain against the Government—especially to the point of displacing its Prime Minister, whom von Haeften honoured by regarding him as the main obstacle in the path of a peace that would fulfil the ambitions of the Prussian militarists. And “when the English home front breaks down, we should have to expect the moral collapse of France and Italy also. Germany would be left victorious, able to impose her terms on her enemies. That was as far as the “will to peace” of Germany’s rule had gone in June, 1918.

The Reichstag Committee after the War dug out a very interesting document summarising the conclusions reached at a Conference at Spa, on July 2nd and 3rd, 1918, between the Kaiser and his chief Ministers, military, naval and civilian.\* The document summarises the peace terms which this Conference decided at that date it would be necessary to secure. The terms with Russia had already been settled at Brest-Litovsk. As regards Poland, it was decided that she must become a vassal state of Germany—not of Austria—and that Germany should control her economy and her railways, lay tribute on her to help pay the cost of the War, and annex further strips of Polish territory. As to Belgium, the Conference decided:—

“Belgium must come under German influence, so that it can never again come under Franco-British influence and serve as an area of deployment for the enemy.

To this end we must insist on the division of Flanders and the Walloon provinces into two separate states, united only through a personal union and economic arrangements. Belgium will be brought into the closest relations with Germany through a Customs Union, Railway Company and so on. For the present no Belgian Army must be formed.

Germany will protect itself by a long occupation, which will be gradually reduced, until finally the Flanders coast and Liege will be evacuated. Complete evacuation will depend upon Belgium allying herself as closely as possible to us. In particular there must be a guarantee of unconditional reliability for the defence of the coast of Flanders.”

And the Reichstag Committee declared in their findings that:

“Up to 15th July, 1918, the Supreme Army Command rejected the view that victory was no longer possible of attainment by force of arms, and gave no support to peace negotiations upon the basis of a military stalemate. . . .”†

\* “Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918,” Vol. II, p. 3.

† *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 23.

Evidence of such a kind, from German sources of undeniable authority, makes it clear that at no time prior to the autumn of 1918 could we have concluded a satisfactory peace with Germany. Ludendorff would have nothing to do with any terms which would involve complete restoration of Belgium, and as the Reichstag Committee point out in their findings: —

“The Government relied upon the judgment of the Supreme Army Command, until this body itself confessed to the impossibility of victory. The Government was devoid of any person who was capable of making a stand against the will of the Supreme Army Command.”\*

Nor, it may be added, was the Austrian Government able to stand up to Ludendorff and insist upon peace being negotiated, even though the Austrians were starving, Vienna was rioting, and only by means of military pressure in the Ukraine and by embezzlement of supplies of grain passing along the Danube for Germany was it possible for them to avert utter breakdown. For all her desperate plight, Austria did not dare to make peace until all hope of success was gone to the West, until her own armies had been routed on both the Italian and the Serbian Fronts, and a revolution had broken out in Vienna which displaced the Emperor and his officials, substituting for them men who were ready to disregard the fading authority of Germany.

It was not until the defeat of the German offensive at Rheims and the collapse of the German resistance on August 8th had shattered Ludendorff's last hope of putting up an effective defence that he began seriously to contemplate the possibility of having to seek peace on the best attainable terms. And even then he could not bring himself to recognise that it would have to be negotiated very quickly, if he were to find him still in a position to defend the Fatherland. On August 14th, a conference was held at the General Headquarters at Spa, presided over by the Kaiser. It was a gloomy gathering. Reports were received of food shortage, war weariness and political unrest at home, of failure of sympathy among the neutral nations, and of despair among Germany's allies. Ludendorff had to cap this with the declaration that it had become hopeless to break the will of Germany's enemies by military operations, and all that could be done was to hold them up with a strategic defensive.

The Kaiser agreed, and admitted that Germany would have to find a suitable moment in which to come to an understanding with the enemy. This, he proposed, should be through the mediation of a neutral, and he mentioned the King of Spain and the Queen of Holland as suitable agents for such a procedure. But the view of the

\* “Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918,” Vol. I, p. 24.

Conference was that "a suitable moment" was not yet come. Hindenburg, like the stout old warrior he was, expressed his view of the military situation in the words:—

"I hope for all that, that we may succeed in keeping our footing on French soil, and thereby in the end impose our will on the enemy!"

When the minute of the Conference came before him, Ludendorff took it upon himself to strike out the opening phrase of this pronouncement, and make it read that the General Field-Marshal "declared that we would succeed in keeping our footing, etc." What had been an expression of courageous hope thereby became an explicit assurance. The result of this, and of the vagueness in which the Conference left the question of the "suitable moment," was that the old Chancellor, Count Hertling, was quite deceived as to the real gravity of the situation, and had no sense of urgency about the launching of peace negotiations. The fact was that neither soldiers nor civilians were ready to shoulder the responsibility for making peace on the assumption of an assured defeat. There was no man strong enough to admit that it was no longer possible for Germany to dominate the peace negotiations through the strength of her armies and the extent of her conquests. Two courses were at this moment open for such a man had he been at the top. Either he could have insisted on immediate negotiations being opened, while his armies were still capable of a dangerous resistance and the area they occupied was considerable; or, judging that a confident and advancing enemy would not be in a mood to make terms, he could have thrown all his energies into the development of formidable defence works along the German frontier, and have withdrawn his armies behind them as promptly as possible, abandoning Belgium before he was driven out, and massing his forces on a very greatly shortened line which he could hold against any attack with the troops he still possessed until peace terms had been agreed. The latter course would have had the moral advantage of an appeal to the German people to make a supreme effort to defend the Fatherland. It would also have had the practical advantage of delaying the Allied attack on the new line of defence until the spring. The necessary artillery and supplies to resume the offensive could not have been brought up before the winter closed.

The German leaders took neither course. They fell between two stools. They delayed appealing for peace, and at the same time insisted on contesting every yard of ground in France and Flanders as long as possible. As a result, their forces were wasted away in fruitless struggles to hold back the Allies, and they were unable to spare the men to erect sound fortifications on the frontier. By the end, they could not dispose of the strength among the beaten and dispirited troops



make a successful stand on any line, and Germany had to capitulate on most abject terms.

Ludendorff's misreading of the situation comes out clearly in the fact that, when definitely interrogated by von Hintze, the German Foreign Secretary, as to the peace terms he was willing to consider in regard to Belgium,\* he replied, on August 21st that he could not agree to a restoration of the *status quo ante*. On the strength of his declarations, von Hintze summoned that day a meeting of the party leaders, and told them that: —

“In view of the Supreme Army Command, the military situation gives no occasion for depression. There is no reason to doubt that we shall be victorious. We shall only be defeated if we give up hope of victory. In the view of the Supreme Army Command, we are warranted in maintaining the hope that we shall reach a military position which enables us to achieve a satisfactory peace.”†

On August 24th, the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor prepared a statement to the effect that on the conclusion of peace Germany would give up Belgium without imposing an indemnity on her or any condition other than that Germany should enjoy as full political, military and economic relations with her as any other country.‡ But when they submitted this to Ludendorff on the following day, he refused to agree to it. He insisted that it should include mention of the fact that Germany proposed special relations with the Flemish, and also that in exchange Germany must have all her colonies back. He eventually agreed on a summary that brought out these points, and so the freedom of the seas and the insistence on continued territorial integrity of Germany and her allies. This statement was not to be published, but could set out the basis for any negotiations.

On August 30th, the Austrian Ambassador at Berlin informed the German Government‡ that Austria felt herself compelled to take independent steps to bring the War to an end. The German Foreign Secretary, von Hintze, was promptly dispatched to Vienna to dissuade Austria from such a course. He took a message from Ludendorff to the effect that the Allies were about to launch a big offensive on the Western Front, and that he was anticipating its outcome with complete confidence, and therefore did not think the moment well-chosen for any peace move.

The confidence, however, turned out to be misplaced. Attacks had been launched along the whole Franco-British Front at the end of August which: —

\* “Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918,” Vol. II, p. 236.

† *ibid.*, p. 237.

‡ *ibid.*, p. 240.

"... press strenuously upon four retreating German Armies.

On 26th August the English 1st Army captures the heights of Monchy-le-Preux, reaches Croisilles on the 28th on the tracks of the German 17th Army and comes into contact with the Hindenburg Line. After having repulsed violent counter-attacks on 29th August, it thrusts on 2nd September into the Hindenburg Line goes several kilometres beyond it and compels the German 17th Army to withdraw over the canal in the north, from the Sensée to Péronne.

In the south, beginning on 27th August, the English 3rd and 4th Armies, and the French 1st and 3rd Armies follow the German 2nd and 18th Armies which are fighting in retreat in accordance with Ludendorff's orders; they capture Bapaume, Comblanchien, Chaulnes, Roye, Noyon. On the 30th and 31st, the English 4th Army conquers Péronne; thereby the line of the Somme has been turned.

East of the Oise, during this same period, the 10th Army puts up a hard fight between the Aisne and the Ailette and on the plain north of Soissons; but the German 9th Army hangs on vigorously to the Saint-Gobain range, since its fall would involve the rupture of the Hindenburg Line at its most vulnerable spot, the hinge forming the junction of the north to south branch and the west to east branch. However, on 2nd September, south of the forest of Coucy, the 10th Army reaches and even in places goes beyond the Chauny-Soissons road—the last objective which Foch appointed for it in his General Directions of 11th August; it is thus in position for the attack on the Hindenburg Line."\*

On September 2nd the British attacked along the line from Péronne to north of Arras, and in the centre they stormed the Drocourt-Quéant switch—the strongest point in the Hindenburg system and the key to the whole line. The Kaiser fell ill when he heard the news, and Hertling, the Chancellor, wrote urgently to Hindenburg for news of the military outlook.† Hindenburg replied that he would tell him by word of mouth, but somehow managed to let the succeeding day pass without the interview. Meantime, von Hintze had a cheerful visit to Vienna. He got there on September 3rd, Ludendorff's confident message now merely a torn and crumpled piece of waste paper in his pocket. At a big conference on the 5th, Count Burian bluntly declared: "For us, it is the absolute finish!"‡ On September 6th von Hintze came back to Berlin with tidings that Austria-Hungary was bent on immediate peace.

Next day, however, the Austrian Emperor offered to postpone

\* Général René Tournès: "Foch et la victoire des Alliés" (Vol. IV of "Histoire de la guerre mondiale," p. 210).

† "Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918," Vol. II, p. 2.

‡ *ibid.*, p. 243.

peace Note, if he got satisfactory answers to the questions how the military situation now stood, on what line Hindenburg intended to take up his final stand during peace negotiations, when that line would be reached, and when the Supreme Army Command thought the time would be ripe for the negotiations to start.

Von Hintze went off to Spa to get the answers to these questions, like for the benefit of Austria and for his own Chancellor. The information he collected was hardly satisfactory. It showed that:—

“The number of divisions available as reserves changed daily; some divisions were being broken up to complete others. The Supreme Army Command described major offensives as out of the question; counter-attacks as possible. To the question about a line which could be held under all conditions, if necessary by counter-attacks, the Supreme Army Command answered: ‘Our basic intention is to stay where we are.’ The question about reserves and war material was answered cautiously: ‘we certainly were building hardly any tanks . . . the fighting value of the troops was suffering from insufficient food; potatoes were lacking. . . .’ To the question whether an offensive against the Salonika Army was expected, the answer was: ‘Yes, a little one.’”\*

Hindenburg said he could not agree to the issue of the public appeal for peace which Austria-Hungary now contemplated. But he could be prepared forthwith to concur in an approach to the other side through a neutral Power to arrange for a conference on peace terms. His statement to this effect, dated September 10th, was the first explicit consent of the German Command to enter immediately on peace negotiations. It was followed next day by a message that the Kaiser and the Supreme Army Command were agreeable to such a *démarche* being made through the Queen of the Netherlands.

But the Emperor Karl could wait no longer. His Empire was crumbling around him. Not even a special telegram which Kaiser Wilhelm sent him on September 14th diverted his purpose.† On that day he issued his appeal for peace, in the form of a public invitation to all the Governments of belligerent States to hold a confidential discussion in some neutral meeting-place with a view to agreeing on a basis for the speedy negotiation of peace.

The Austrian Note of September 14th was a long document, which began by referring to the pronouncement of the Central Powers in December, 1916, (described previously in these Memoirs,‡) and asserted that they had never given up the conciliatory and basic ideas of that offer. But it went on to argue that there were signs of a

\* “Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918,” Vol. II, p. 244.

† *ibid.*, p. 245.

‡ Chap. XXXIX: The German and Wilson Peace Notes of December, 1916.



growing unity of the ideas on both sides since then, and suggested that the agreement on general principles should be now transformed into concrete terms of peace:—

“The basic standpoint has changed under the influence of the military and political position, and hitherto, at any rate, it has not led to a tangible and practically utilisable general result. It is true that, independent of all these oscillations, it can be stated that the distance between the conceptions of the two sides has, on the whole, grown somewhat less, that, despite the indisputable continuance of the decided and hitherto unbridged differences, a partial turning from many of the extremist concrete war aims is visible, and a certain agreement relative to the general basic principles of a world peace manifests itself.

In both camps there is undoubtedly observable in broad classes of the population a growth of the will to peace and understanding. Moreover, a comparison of the reception of the peace proposal of the Powers of the Quadruple Alliance by their opponents with late utterances of responsible statesmen of the latter, as well as of non-responsible but in a political respect by no means unimportant personalities, confirms this impression. . . .

For an unprejudiced observer there can be no doubt that in all belligerent States without exception the desire for a peace of understanding has been enormously strengthened, that the conviction is increasingly spreading that a further continuance of the sanguinary struggle must transform Europe into ruins and a state of exhaustion that will cripple its development for decades to come, and this without any guarantee of at the same time bringing about that decision by arms which has been vainly striven after by both sides in four years full of enormous sacrifices, sufferings, and exertions.”

The difficulty was that no Government cared to risk its standing with its own people by a public offer of concessions. Accordingly Austria-Hungary proposed that there should be a conference at which delegates of the warring powers should put forth in a confidential and non-binding discussion their terms—after which exchange of views the Governments would know just what hope there was of meeting to conclude peace.

“According to our conviction all the belligerents owe it to humanity jointly to examine whether now, after so many years of costly but undecided struggle, the entire course of which points to an understanding, it is possible to make an end to the terrible struggle. The Royal and Imperial Government would like, therefore, to propose to the Governments of all belligerent States to send delegates to a confidential and non-binding discussion on basis

principles for the conclusion of peace in a place in a neutral country and at a near date, which would have to be agreed on, the delegates who are appointed to make known to one another the conception of their Governments regarding those principles, to receive analogous communications, and to request and give frank and candid explanations on all those points which need to be precisely defined."

This offer was rejected by the Allied statesmen. This was hardly surprising, in view of the fact that two days before it was issued, Herr von Payer, the German Vice-Chancellor, had delivered a speech in Stuttgart on Germany's war aims which gave little colour to the idea that our enemies were as yet prepared to make any terms which would satisfy us. It was a speech in a defiant vein. As regards the east of Europe, he declared there could be no meddling with the settlement of Brest-Litovsk and the peace treaties with the Ukraine, Russia and Roumania. "In the East we have peace, and it remains for us peace, whether it pleases our western neighbours or not." All the German colonies must be restored and every inch of territory belonging to Germany and her allies—which, of course, included all former Turkish territory in Arabia, Mesopotamia and Palestine. Germany would naturally refuse to surrender Alsace-Lorraine. He held out a hope that they might release Belgium:—

"We can, when things have got to that stage, restore Belgium. If we and our allies are once again in possession of what belonged to us, if we are first sure that in Belgium no other State will be more favourably placed than we, then Belgium, I think I may say, can be given back without encumbrance and without reserve. The requisite understanding between Belgium and ourselves will be all the easier because our economic interests are frequently parallel, and Belgium is even directly dependent on us as a Hinterland. We have also no reason to doubt that the Flemish question will be solved in accordance with the dictates of justice and wise statesmanship. It is hypocrisy to represent Belgium as the innocent victim of our policy, and to clothe her, as it were, in the white garment of innocence. . . ."

Von Payer claimed that Germany was entitled to indemnities from her enemies, but would be willing to forgo them for the sake of peace! There was, of course, no suggestion on his part of indemnifying Belgium in any way. Germany would also be willing to join a League of Nations, and to join in disarmament, provided this included the freedom of the seas and abolition of Britain's naval predominance.

"We desire to have a disarmament agreement on the condition of complete reciprocity, applied not merely to the land armies but even

to naval forces. In pursuance of the same idea, and going even beyond it, we will raise in the negotiations a demand for the freedom of the seas and sea routes, for the open door in all overseas possessions, and for the protection of private property at sea; and if negotiations take place in regard to the protection of small nations and of national minorities in individual States, we shall willingly advocate the international arrangements which will act like a deliverance in countries under Great Britain's domination."

The intransigence of manner of this speech might have been discounted, had the substance of the terms offered been satisfactory. But it was quite evident that Germany was not as yet prepared to consider the terms which we regarded as just and now within our reach—such matters as not only the unconditional evacuation of Belgium, but compensation to her for the wrong committed against her; the restitution of France's lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine; rehabilitation of Serbia; freedom for the Czechs, and for the Italian Trentino, and the emancipation of the Arabs. The voice we heard was still that of an arrogant military Imperialism, irritated by the temporary check to its ambitions, but unmollified in heart and immutable in purpose.

It is symptomatic of the unchanged quality of the German Government up to this point that although the former Chancellor, von Bethmann-Hollweg, had induced the Kaiser at Easter, 1917, to promise a reform of the extremely unequal and undemocratic Prussian franchise, that pledge had still remained unhonoured and unimplemented. Not until after the Supreme Army Command had reached the stage of despair and insistence upon an armistice was Wilhelm ultimately compelled by the stubborn insistence of von Hintze to sign a decree authorising a new constitution. In mid-September, 1918, we were still dealing with a Germany which in the last resort was in effect autocratic with its titular head, the Kaiser, completely under the thumb of the military leaders. We were reluctant to enter into a conference which did not commit the Central Powers beforehand to concessions which we regarded as essential, and at which the discussions would inevitably give the Germans a whole winter to reform their broken armies, to throw up a new line of defence, to replenish their exhausted stores of food and material and to recover their lost morale.

Speaking in Manchester on the same day as Herr von Payer made his statement at Stuttgart, and therefore without knowledge of it, he said:—

"The first indispensable condition, in my judgment, is that civilisation shall establish beyond doubt its power to enforce its decrees. . . . Prussian military power must not only be beaten, but Germany herself must know that. The German people must know



that if their rulers outrage the laws of humanity, Prussian military strength cannot protect them from punishment. There is no right you can establish, national or international, unless you establish the fact that the man who breaks the law will meet inevitable punishment. Unless this is accomplished, the loss, the suffering, and the burdens of this war will have been in vain."

Clearly there was a great gulf between the viewpoint expressed here by me, and that to which von Payer was on the same day giving utterance. If the Vice-Chancellor was voicing the official opinion of the German Government, then we were not as yet near enough to a common mind upon peace issues to hope for favourable results from a conference. The Austrian Note was, in fact, issued in defiance of Berlin, but we were not aware of that. We had already received so many overtures from Austria which turned out on the test to be illusive that we were not disposed to waste time on any more vague suggestions or secret conferences.

Accordingly, Mr. Balfour, speaking at the Savoy Hotel on September 16th, declared that:—

"I cannot bring myself to believe that this is an honest desire on the part of our enemies to arrive at an understanding with us on terms which it would be possible for us to accept. . . . This is not an attempt to make peace by understanding, but an attempt to weaken forces which are proving too strong for them in the field, by working upon those sentiments, honourable in their origin, mistaken in development, which they believe to exist in all countries, and which they think capable of being turned to their purpose to work out their end. . . ."

Although Mr. Balfour described his speech as merely that of "an individual Minister," it expressed the general view of his colleagues. And that view was shared by the country at large. Mr. Asquith, the leader of the Opposition, spoke at Manchester 11 days later, on September 27th, and adopted the same attitude. He said:—

"I am bound to say that, whatever its motive, Count Burian's present suggestion does not commend itself to me as a practical proposition. . . . I do not want to find myself bogged and befogged in a jungle. . . . Our objects have (as we think) been plainly stated both here and in America. . . ."

The United States Government sent a prompt reply to the Austrian Note, pointing out that its peace aims had already been clearly set out in President Wilson's Fourteen Points, and that the United States can and will entertain no proposal for a Conference upon a matter

concerning which it has made its position and purpose so plain." Seeing that the Fourteen Points included such items as the evacuation of all Russian territory, the independence of Poland, the evacuation and restoration of Belgium, the return to France of Alsace and Lorraine, incorporation of the Trentino with Italy, freedom for the Balkans and autonomy for the subject populations of Austria and Turkey—all of them matters to which von Payer had at Stuttgart returned an emphatic and explicit "No!"—it was evident that for the moment no peace was in prospect to which America would agree.

President Wilson followed up this reply in a speech at New York on September 27th, in which he laid down five essential conditions of peace:—

"First, the impartial justice meted out must involve no discrimination between those to whom we wish to be just and those to whom we do not wish to be just. It must be a justice that plays no favourites and knows no standards but the equal rights of the several peoples concerned.

Second, no special or separate interest of any single nation or any group of nations can be made the basis of any part of the settlement which is not consistent with the common interest of all.

Third, there can be no leagues or alliances or special covenants and understandings within the general and common family of the League of Nations.\*

Fourthly, and more specifically, there can be no special, selfish economic combinations within the League, and no employment of any form of economic boycott or exclusion, except as the power of economic penalty, by exclusion from the markets of the world may be vested in the League of Nations itself as a means of discipline and control.

Fifthly, all international agreements and treaties of every kind must be made known in their entirety to the rest of the world."

These five principles are of interest as setting out the attitude entirely different from that of traditional "Power Diplomacy," which both America and Britain had come to adopt towards the problems of war and peace. They were principles which we later sought, with some measure of success, to incorporate in the Peace Treaty. The measure in which the world has departed from them in subsequent years is the measure of the chaos and trouble into which it has been plunged.

President Wilson made in this speech another pronouncement which indicated the real difficulty we had in any approach to peace negotiations. He said:—

\* Arrangements like the Locarno Treaty, the Stresa Pact, the Franco-Russian Pact, the Treaty between Italy and Austria, the Petite Entente and other particularist undertakings of that kind constitute a departure from this principle.

"We are all agreed that there can be no peace obtained by any kind of bargain or compromise with the Governments of the Central Empires, because we have dealt with them already and have seen them deal with other Governments that were parties to this struggle, at Brest-Litovsk and at Bukharest. They have convinced us that they are without honour and do not intend justice. They observe no covenants, accept no principle but force and their own interest. We cannot 'come to terms' with them. They have made it impossible. The German people must by this time be fully aware that we cannot accept the word of those who forced this war upon us. We do not think the same thoughts or speak the same language of agreement."

This was in fact our greatest problem. We had no desire to go on fighting the Germans or Austrians a needless hour. Nor, when this war ended, would we have any lust to plot for another. But we knew that if this war ended in a sort of armed truce, leaving the present militarist régime of the Central Empires still in authority and undefeated, they would have only one purpose—to prepare for a renewal of the conflict at a more favourable moment, with more formidable arms and better-laid plans. Thus our only hope was to keep on till they had been defeated in the field and discredited at home. Had they been able to boast that they had successfully defied the armies and Navies of two continents and, still unbeaten, made peace on foreign soil they had conquered, and from which they could not be driven, their power for mischief would have been unbroken.

The British Trade Union Congress passed on September 6th a resolution calling for:—

"the destruction of every arbitrary power anywhere that can separately, secretly, and of its single choice disturb the peace of the world, or if it cannot be presently destroyed, at the least its reduction to virtual impotence. . . . The Congress urges the Government to establish peace negotiations immediately the enemy either voluntarily or by compulsion evacuates France and Belgium. . . ."

That substantially poses the problem. We could only make peace when the defeat of the Central Powers was a fact patently established, and their forces withdrew or were driven from France and Belgium. Without fulfilment of those conditions, a peace would be only a truce, under cover of which the redoubtable military leaders of Germany could gather up her strength for a renewed conflict and we should be compelled to prepare for the next struggle.

As it happened, the Note of Count Burian was not a blow in service of Germany's "Peace Offensive" strategy. It was a cry of despair.



Its appearance on September 15th in the Berlin Press struck public opinion in Germany with the shock of a thunderbolt, and the Reichstag party leaders rushed together and demanded an interview with the Chancellor. He succeeded in calming them, and von Hintze worked to utilise the Austrian Note as a basis for arranging a Peace Conference at the Hague. On September 28th the Dutch Government announced that the Queen of the Netherlands would place her residence at the disposal of the Powers for Conferences on the lines of the Note.\*

But events were moving too fast for von Hintze. On September 15th, the day after Burian dispatched his Note, General Franchet d'Esperey launched a great attack on the Salonika Front which routed the Bulgars and sent the Allied forces sweeping forward to victory. On September 28th the envoys of the Bulgarian Government reached Salonika to sue for an armistice and abandon hostilities. On September 28th the German Foreign Office produced a Memorandum setting out the necessity for an immediate reconstruction of the Government on a broad democratic basis as a preliminary to the peace negotiations which were essential. That morning, von Hintze started for Spa to find out the full truth about the military situation, and the next train found Count Hertling, the Chancellor, heading in the same direction to discover if it was really true that Ludendorff was in agreement with the proposal for a Government reconstruction—to which Hertling was unalterably opposed. And on September 28th, Ludendorff and Hindenburg took stock of the outlook and reached the despairing conclusion that the War was lost, and that there was nothing for it but to appeal at once to the enemy for an armistice. In his Memoirs, "Out of My Life," Hindenburg describes this decision in the following terms:—

"It was on 28th September that this inward battle raged most fiercely. Though German courage on the Western Front still denied our enemies a final break through, though France and England were visibly tiring and America's oppressive superiority bled in vain a thousand times, our resources were patently diminishing. The worse the news from the Far East, the sooner they would fail altogether. Who would close the gap if Bulgaria fell out once and for all? We could still do much, but we could not build up a new front. It was true that a new army was in process of formation in Serbia, but how weak these troops were! Our Alpine Corps had scarcely any effective units, and one of the Austro-Hungarian divisions which were on their way was declared to be totally useless. It consisted of Czechs, who would presumably refuse to fight. Although the Syrian theatre lay far from a decisive point of the War, the defeat there would undoubtedly cause the collapse of our

\* "Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918," Vol. II, p. 240.

loyal Turkish comrades, who now saw themselves threatened in Europe again. What would Roumania, or the mighty fragments of Russia do? All these thoughts swept over me and forced me to decide to seek an end, though only an honourable end. No one would say it was too soon.

In pursuance of such thoughts, and with his mind already made up, my First Quartermaster-General came to see me in the late afternoon of 28th September. I could see in his face what had brought him to me. As had so often happened since 22nd August, 1914, our thoughts were at one before they found expression in words. Our hardest resolve was based on convictions we shared in common.”\*

The 28th of September, 1918, thus becomes a very important date in the history of the War, and of the coming of peace. On the German side, the blame for the final collapse of her war effort has been variously attributed by apologists for her military leaders to the collapse of the home front, the flight of the Kaiser, the mutiny at Kiel, the weakness of Prince Max of Baden, the base machinations of the Socialists, and so on. Before any of these causes operated, Hindenburg and Ludendorff reached the conclusion that the War was hopelessly lost, and that the future could hold out nothing for Germany but a rapid mounting of calamities and defeats. As Ludendorff himself admits, on the Western Front their forces were fading away; battalions reduced from four companies to three; divisions from three brigades to two, of weary, exhausted, underfed men, who were being defeated and driven back at an ever-accelerating pace. As I describe in another chapter, their need for food supplies from the Ukraine made it impossible for them to bring west the troops they had stationed there. Bulgaria had gone. Turkey was going. That meant that Entente troops would soon be on the Danube, and Entente fleets in the Black Sea. Roumania would re-enter the War, and Germany would then be unable to get any petrol—of which she had barely enough to last her aeroplanes for two months.

“The War is now lost. Nothing could alter that. If we had the strength to reverse the situation in the West, then of course nothing would yet have been lost. But we had not the means for that. After the way in which our troops on the Western Front had been used up, we had to count on being beaten back again and again. Our situation could only get worse, never better. There was no hope of further reinforcements for the time being from home. Independently of each other, the Field-Marshal and I came to the conclusion that we must bring things to an end.”†

\* Von Hindenburg: “Out of My Life,” pp. 428 and 429.

† “Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918,” Vol II, p. 256.

Thus Ludendorff. And the conclusion is inescapable that Germany and her allies were in fact defeated in the field, whatever civil collapse was superimposed in November to make her completely helpless before the Entente. Even had that civil collapse not intervened, the following months could only have witnessed the fuller materialisation of the ruin which Ludendorff foresaw.

The Bulgarian Armistice was not, of course, the first breakaway in the World War; Russia and Roumania had ceased fighting months previously. But it was the first collapse on the side of the Central Powers or their allies, and it was, as we have seen, of immense significance in that it led directly to general peace approaches from them. The Allies immediately made arrangements to take full advantage of Bulgaria's elimination to march to the Danube and attack Austria on that front. On September 27th, as soon as Clemenceau knew that there was a prospect of a Bulgarian surrender, he asked both General Franchet d'Esperey, the G.O.C. at Salonika, and General Guillaumat, his predecessor, to submit memoranda setting out their recommendation for the further course of operations. Guillaumat, who was now in Paris, promptly prepared a document which Clemenceau forwarded to me for comments. But while this document was on its way to Signor Orlando in Italy and to me in London, the Bulgarian emissaries were negotiating an armistice with Franchet d'Esperey at Salonika. On September 26th an envoy from the Bulgarian Government arrived at General Milne's Headquarters to ask for a suspension of hostilities. Milne referred him to General Franchet d'Esperey, the Commander-in-Chief of the Salonika forces, and d'Esperey thereafter took in hand the further negotiations, about which he did not consult Milne at all. The envoys reached him on September 28th and signed the Armistice on the following day. It came into force on the 30th. Its terms, which constituted an abject surrender, were as follows:—

“ ARMISTICE CONVENTION WITH BULGARIA,  
SIGNED 29TH SEPTEMBER, 1918.

1. Immediate evacuation of the territories still occupied in Greece and Serbia in conformity with an arrangement to be concluded. No cattle, grain or stores of any kind are to be removed from these territories. No destruction shall be caused by the Bulgarian troops on their departure. The Bulgarian Administration shall continue to carry on its functions in the parts of Bulgaria at present occupied by the Allies.

2. Immediate demobilisation of all the Bulgarian Armies, with the exception that a group of all arms, comprising three divisions of 16 battalions each and four regiments of cavalry, shall be maintained on a war footing, of which two divisions shall be allocated to the defence of the eastern frontier of Bulgaria and of the



Dobrudja, and the 148th Division to the protection of the railways.

3. The arms, ammunition and military transport belonging to the demobilised units shall be deposited at points to be indicated by the Supreme Command of the "Armées d'Orient." They will then be stored by the Bulgarian authorities, and under the control of the Allies.

The horses will likewise be handed over to the Allies.

4. The material belonging to the Fourth Greek Army Corps, which was taken from the Greek Army at the time of the occupation of Eastern Macedonia, shall be handed over to Greece, in so far as it has not been sent to Germany.

5. Those portions of the Bulgarian troops at the present time west of the meridian of Uskub, and belonging to the Eleventh German Army, shall lay down their arms and shall be considered until further notice to be prisoners of war. The officers will retain their arms.

6. Bulgarian prisoners of war in the East shall be employed by the Allied Armies until the conclusion of peace, without reciprocity as regards Allied prisoners of war in Bulgarian hands. These latter shall be handed over without delay to the Allied authorities, and deported civilians shall be entirely free to return to their homes.

7. Germany and Austria-Hungary shall have a period of four weeks to withdraw their troops and military organisations. The diplomatic and consular representatives of the Central Powers, as well as their nationals, must leave Bulgarian territory within the same period. The orders for the cessation of hostilities will be given by the signatories of the present convention.

General FRANCHET D'ESPEREY.

ANDRE LIAPCHEF.

E. T. LOUKOF.

General Headquarters,

29th September, 1918, 10.50 p.m."

On October 5th I arrived at Versailles for a series of conferences with Clemenceau and Orlando and our military advisers about the situation arising from the termination of hostilities in Bulgaria. We recognised that this success must be exploited in three directions: first of all we must cut the communications between Turkey and the Central Powers, and force Turkey out of the War; then we must push up to Roumania and help her to drive out the garrison of Austrian troops and re-enter the War on the Allied side; and finally, by advancing up to the Danube we could menace Austria herself. Of these developments, the earliest in point of time was likely to be the overthrow of Turkey, and we proceeded to discuss the terms on which Turkey might be granted an armistice. Marshal

Foch's advice was summed up in a series of short sentences scribbled by him upon a sheet of notepaper, which is before me as I write. It was as follows: —

“ Mon Conseil.

1. Couper les chemins de fer du territoire allemand à Constantinople.

A Nisch, on en coupe une partie.

Sur la Maritza, en amont d'Adrianople on les coupe tous.

2. Prendre possession des points stratégiques de la Bulgarie qui assurent le désarmement de l'Armée bulgare.

3. Jeter une A.C. au Danube pour y couper les communications fluviales de l'ennemi et au besoin tendre la main à la Roumanie.

4. Ultérieurement, ces conditions réalisées, entrevoir, étudier, préparer action contre Turquie.

F. FOCH.

4/10/18.”

(Translation.)

“ My Advice.

1. Cut the railway lines running from German territory to Constantinople.

At Nish, a section is to be cut.

On the Maritza, up-stream from Adrianople, all are to be cut.

2. Take possession of strategic points in Bulgaria that will ensure the disarmament of the Bulgarian Army.

3. Fling an army corps to the Danube to cut the enemy's river communications there and if necessary to lend a hand to Roumania.

4. Thereafter, when these conditions are carried out, examine, study, prepare an action against Turkey.”

At this time, Allenby was pursuing his victorious campaign in Syria. Damascus had fallen on October 1st, and on October 6th, I heard, while at Versailles, that a Turkish emissary had reached Mytilene on his way to Athens. I had with me a draft of armistice terms for Turkey which had been already approved by the British War Cabinet, and I laid this before the Conference. It was referred to the military experts, and with their emendations was ultimately as follows: —

1. “ Immediate demobilisation of the Turkish Army, except for such troops as are required for the surveillance of the frontier and for the maintenance of internal order (effectives to be determined by the Allies).

2. Opening of the Dardanelles and Bosphorus, and access to the Black Sea. Allied occupation of Dardanelles and Bosphorus forts.
3. Free use by Allied ships of all ports and anchorages now in Turkish occupation and denial of their use by the enemy.
4. Surrender of all war-vessels in Turkish waters, or in waters occupied by the Turks. These ships to be interned at such port or ports as may be directed.
5. Wireless telegraph and cable stations to be administered by the Allies.
6. Positions of all minefields, torpedo tubes, and other obstructions in Turkish waters to be indicated, and assistance given to sweep or remove them as may be required.
7. All available information as to mines in the Black Sea to be communicated.
8. Use of Constantinople as a naval base for the Allies and use of all ship repair facilities at all Turkish ports and arsenals.
9. Facilities to be given for the purchase of coal, oil fuel and naval material from Turkish sources.
10. Occupation by Allied troops of important strategical points.
11. Allied Control Officers to be placed on all railways including such portions of the Trans-Caucasian railways now under Turkish control, which must be placed at the free and complete disposal of the Allied authorities. This clause to include Allied occupation of Baku and Batoum.
12. Allied occupation of the Taurus tunnel system.
13. Immediate withdrawal of Turkish troops from North-West Persia and Trans-Caucasia to behind the pre-War frontier.
14. The surrender of all garrisons in the Hejaz, Assir, Yemen, Syria, Cilicia, and Mesopotamia to the nearest Allied Commander or Arab representative.
15. The surrender of all Turkish Officers in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica to the nearest Italian garrison.
16. The surrender of all ports occupied in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, including Misurata, to the nearest Allied garrison.
17. Surrender of all Germans and Austrians, naval, military and civilian, to the nearest British or Allied Commander.
18. Compliance with such orders as may be conveyed for the disposal and disposition of the Turkish Army and its equipment, arms and ammunition, including transport.
19. Appointment of Allied Officers to control army supplies.
20. All Allied prisoners of war, and Armenian interned persons and prisoners, to be collected in Constantinople and handed over unconditionally to the Allies.
21. Obligations on the part of Turkey to cease all relations with the Central Powers."



We had received information that the Sultan was anxious to ensure the guarantee of two points in any terms accorded him: first, that he should retain his throne; and second, that Turkey should remain an independent nation. It will be seen that the above Armistice provisions did not affect either of these two issues.

Turkish Armies were offering a weakening resistance to our progress in Syria and Mesopotamia, and might continue to do so for some time. It was clear to us that our success in Bulgaria would not enable us to exert considerable additional pressure on Turkey from the north, with a view to hastening her surrender. General Franchet d'Esperey had not only replied to Clemenceau's request for a Memorandum sketching out the further action to be taken, but we learned that without waiting for confirmation he had begun to put this programme into action. The British Army had hitherto occupied the right flank of the Allied line and by no means the most salubrious sector of the front. General Franchet d'Esperey now proposed to break up the British forces at Salonika under General Milne and diverting some of them up in Bulgaria while placing a part under a French General, to march along with French troops on to Constantinople. The French were very anxious to get that city into their own hands. They seem to have had a secret fear that if once the British got hold of it we might develop independent plans for its ultimate disposal. Needless to say, such an idea was completely without foundation, and I raised the strongest protest against this cavalier treatment being meted out by d'Esperey to our forces and their General. Clemenceau gave way at once, and sent instructions to d'Esperey to re-group the British forces in their original positions on the east of the Allied line. In a further telegram he sent the decisions of the Conference as to the further course of operations on the Balkan Front. These ran:—

"The British, French and Italian Governments agree that the immediate action of the Allies for exploiting the situation in the Balkans shall be developed on the following bases:—

1. The section of the Allied Army of the East marching on Constantinople shall be under the immediate command of the British General, who shall himself be under the orders of the Allied Commander-in-Chief;
2. The section of the Army of the East marching on Constantinople shall consist mainly of British troops, but shall also include French, Italian, Greek and Serbian troops;
3. Reciprocally, some British troops shall take part in the operation in the North."

Two days later, on October 9th, at the end of the last meeting of the Conference, it was agreed, on my proposition:—

"To refer to the Military Representatives at Versailles, with whom should be associated representatives of the American, British, French and Italian Navies, the question of the liaison between the naval and military forces of the Allies in the forthcoming operations against Constantinople, together with the question of the command of the Allied naval forces engaged in these operations."

But if the fall of Bulgaria thus enabled us to concert fuller measures for achieving victory in the south-east of Europe, its effects were even more immediately apparent in the main theatres of war. Hindendorff and Hindenburg had already been forced to the conclusion that there was nothing for them to do but to abandon the fight. And even before the Conference at Versailles of October 29th had assembled, this decision of theirs had borne fruit.

The course of events in Germany between September 29th and October 4th may be briefly summarised. It involved an internal political crisis which changed the constitution of the Empire. And it provided a further illustration of the completeness with which Germany's affairs were at this time dominated by the Military High Command. Theirs was the only voice that counted—even to ordering revolution.

On September 29th there was a conference at Spa, when Ludendorff set out his reasons for requiring an immediate armistice—a condition of which, he recognised, must be the reconstruction of the Government on a democratic basis.\* There were really a series of conferences: first between the Army Heads and von Hintze, the Foreign Secretary; then another with the Kaiser; and in the afternoon the Chancellor, Count Hertling, arrived to hear the story again. Hindendorff was extremely emphatic that there was no time to lose; that "every hour of delay is dangerous!" He gave von Hintze the impression that imminent catastrophe threatened the Army. When the Kaiser arrived, he heard the same story, with the same complete surprise and dismay. At midday the elderly Chancellor turned up and heard the news. He came out of the room and said to his son: "It's absolutely terrible! The Supreme Army Command demands that *as soon as it can possibly be done*, a request for peace be sent to the Entente!"

In the afternoon, they talked over the political situation. Count Hertling, an old reactionary, refused to remain Chancellor with a democratic, parliamentary government, and tendered his resignation, which the Kaiser accepted. Among the names suggested for his successor was Prince Max of Baden. Von Hintze also offered his resignation; for he too represented the old traditions of the Empire;

\* "Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918," Vol. II, p. 260 seq.

but the Kaiser refused to accept it. Hertling was unwilling to believe too seriously in the need for revolutionary reforms, and the Kaiser took courage from his attitude to suggest that they might leave over the transition to democracy for another fortnight or so. A draft decree lay on the table, authorising the political transition. It was dated September 30th. The Kaiser let it lie, and went to the dock. Von Hintze followed him, reminding him that the Supreme War Command insisted on an immediate appeal for an armistice, and of the necessity for any application to the enemy for armistice or peace negotiations being sent by a democratically constituted Government. Tired, bewildered, the Kaiser turned back and affixed his signature. It was not a very big reform. Its purport was that the Kaiser was willing to call into his Government the representatives of the majority parties in the Reichstag: but he still retained in his own hands the appointment of the Chancellor. Addressed to Count von Hertling, it accepted his resignation, and went on to say: —

“I desire that the German people shall co-operate more effectively than heretofore in the determination of our country's fate. It is therefore my wish that men who are supported by the confidence of the people shall take part in wide measure in the rights and duties of the Government. I beg you to conclude your work by carrying on the business of Government and initiating the measures which I intend to introduce until I have found your successor. I look forward to your proposals in this matter.”

With the signature in his pocket, von Hintze dashed back the same night by a special train to Berlin, to get the party leaders come together to form a ministry, and to find someone to take over the post of Chancellor. Before leaving the German H.Q., he had sent off telegrams to Vienna and Constantinople, urging that Austria and Turkey should join with Germany in an appeal to President Wilson for peace on the basis of the Fourteen Points, and an invitation to him to summon a Peace Conference at Washington, subject to an immediate armistice. He had now to form a Government and find a Chancellor that would undertake to carry out this approach to America without a moment's delay. He was pursued, on October 1, by a telegram from Hindenburg which said: —

“If by seven or eight o'clock this evening it is certain that Prince Max of Baden will form the Government, I agree to the postponement till to-morrow forenoon.

If, on the contrary, the formation of the Government should in any way doubtful, I consider it desirable that the declaration should be issued to foreign Governments to-night.”\*

\* “Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden,” Vol. II, p. 4.



Hindenburg had, of course, no conception of the time it takes to run a Government on democratic lines, especially when it is a coalition Government. Neither he nor Germany had the experience of such matters which accumulates in a country subject to parliamentary government. Prince Max had as yet no intimate knowledge of the military situation or the international outlook, but had a very definite idea that it would be impolitic to appeal for an armistice with the impetuous haste counselled by the Supreme Command. According to his own account, he in the end accepted the post of Chancellor mainly in order to be in a position to delay such an act. The Reichstag Committee notes in its findings that: —

“The Chancellor, Prince Max von Baden, exhausted every resource open to him, to avoid what he regarded as the false step of appealing for an immediate armistice.”\*

At a Crown Council held on the evening of October 2nd, he began to protest against an immediate appeal for an Armistice, but the Kaiser promptly silenced him with the reminder that the Supreme Command held it necessary. He appealed in writing to Hindenburg, and got back a reply next day, saying: —

“The Supreme Command insists on its demand of Sunday, 29th September, that a peace offer to our enemies be issued at once.”†

Prince Max made yet another appeal to Hindenburg on 3rd of October, and when it was rejected at a Conference, he suggested that a peace offer should be sent without an appeal for an armistice. That suggestion also was turned down. So on October 4th, he duly patched the Note, the text of which had been agreed by the Supreme Command. It was addressed to President Wilson, and was as follows: —

“The German Government requests the President of the United States of America to take in hand the restoration of Peace, acquaint all belligerent States with this request, and invite them to send plenipotentiaries for the purpose of opening negotiations. The German Government accepts the programme set forth by the President of the United States in his message to Congress of January 8th, 1918, and in his later pronouncements, especially his speech of September 27th, as a basis for peace negotiations.

With a view to avoiding further bloodshed, the German Government requests the immediate conclusion of an armistice on land and sea and in the air.

MAX, PRINCE OF BADEN,  
Imperial Chancellor.”

\* *Die Ursachen des Deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918*, Vol. II, p. 24.  
† *Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden*, Vol. II, p. 19.

Simultaneously with the dispatch of this note, a note couched in similar terms was also dispatched by Austria. It ran as follows: —

“The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which has always waged war solely as a defensive war, and has repeatedly announced readiness to put an end to the bloodshed and to attain a just and honourable peace, approaches herewith the President of the United States of America with a proposal to conclude with him and his allies an immediate armistice on land and sea and in the air and immediately thereupon to enter into negotiations for the conclusion of peace, for which the Fourteen Points of President Wilson’s message to Congress of the 8th January, 1918, and the Four Points in his speech of the 12th February, 1918, should serve as a basis, while attention will likewise be paid to the declaration by President Wilson on the 27th September, 1918.”

On the day when these two peace notes, from Germany and Austria, were published, I was on my way to Paris to take part in the Conference with the French and Italian Governments about the situation in Bulgaria and in Turkey to which I have already referred. For the first days of this Conference we were without any official notification about the Peace Notes. President Wilson was sitting on the sidelines despite the request in the German Note that he should “acquaint all belligerent States with this request.” He decided to frame and dispatch his own reply without any consultation with his associates in the common enterprise.

Until we were officially seized of the Notes, we could not, of course, officially decide on our attitude. But, as I informed the Imperial War Cabinet on my return: —

“The representatives of the three Governments, however, met every day and discussed the situation. They also conferred with Marshal Foch and his Chief of Staff, and with the Military Representatives at Versailles, and as a preliminary step, directed their attention to the terms of an Armistice.”

The principles upon which the terms of an armistice with Germany and Austria were to be drawn up were indicated to the Military Representatives as follows: —

1. Total evacuation by the enemy of France, Belgium, Luxemburg and Italy.
2. The Germans to retire behind the Rhine into Germany.
3. Alsace-Lorraine to be evacuated by German troops without occupation by the Allies.
4. The same conditions to apply to the Trentino and Istria.
5. Serbia and Montenegro to be evacuated by the enemy.
6. Evacuation of the Caucasus.

7. Immediate steps to be taken ("*mise en train*") for the evacuation of all territory belonging to Russia and Roumania before the War.

8. Immediate cessation of submarine warfare.

(It was also agreed that the Allied blockade should not be raised.) This decision seems harsh but we were anxious that the period of the Armistice should not be utilised to re-equip Germany for a renewal of the War.

At our discussion on October 8th, we had before us a note from Marshal Foch, on the conditions which he regarded as requisite for armistice with Germany. These were:—

"There can be, for the armies operating in France and Belgium, no question of ceasing hostilities without having:—

1. *Liberated the countries invaded* contrary to all right—namely, Belgium, France, Alsace-Lorraine, Luxemburg—and brought back their population. The enemy will have to evacuate these territories within a fortnight, and their populations will have to be immediately repatriated.

*First condition of the armistice.*

2. *Assured a suitable military base of departure*, permitting us to pursue the War up to the destruction of the enemy force in case the peace negotiations should lead to no result.

For this we must have two or three bridgeheads on the Rhine as high up as Rastadt, Strassburg, and Neu Breisach (bridgehead of a semicircle traced on the right bank with a radius of 30 kilometres with the end of the bridge on the right bank as centre) within a delay of a fortnight.

*Second condition of the armistice.*

3. *Taken possession of security for the reparations* to be exacted for the destruction perpetrated in Allied countries, the demand for which will be presented in the course of the negotiations of the Peace Treaty.

For this the countries on the left bank of the Rhine will be evacuated by enemy troops within a delay of thirty days; they will be occupied and administered by the Allied troops in concert with the local authorities up to the time of the signature of peace.

*Third condition of the armistice.*

Beyond this, it will be necessary to impose the following complementary conditions:—

4. All material of war and supplies of every kind which cannot be evacuated by the German troops within the period fixed must be left in place; it will be prohibited to destroy them.



5. The units which will not have evacuated the prescribed territories within the period fixed will be disarmed and made prisoners of war.

6. The railway material, both permanent way and materials of all kinds, will be left in place, and must not be the object of destruction. All the Belgian and French material seized (or its numerical equivalent) will be immediately restored.

7. The military installations of every kind for the use of troops, camps, barracks, parks, arsenals, etc., will be abandoned intact with prohibition to remove or destroy them.

8. The same will apply to industrial establishments and factories of every kind.

9. Hostilities will cease twenty-four hours after the day which the conditions of the armistice shall have been approved by the contracting parties.

FOCH."

When these conditions were read out, Mr. Bonar Law remarked that this amounted virtually to unconditional capitulation. Baron Sonnino thought that both Foch and the Military Representatives were asking too much. I inclined to the same view. We felt, however, that it was not much good at this stage discussing the matter at length, for we were still in the dark as to what President Wilson proposed to say in reply to the German and Austrian Notes. The American Press took it for granted that he would reject their offer, which was regarded there as a manoeuvre to trick the Allies into a negotiated peace without victory. And in this there was a measure of truth, that Ludendorff and Hindenburg saw in immediate armistice the only hope of rescuing their army intact, as to be able to maintain resistance afterwards, if necessary, on terms which they could not bring themselves to accept. But neither the Americans nor ourselves knew then how near to collapse Germany was, and how hopeless the prospect facing her Supreme Command.

On Tuesday, October 8th, Lansing handed to the Swiss Chargé d'Affaires at Washington, who acted as intermediary for communications between the United States and Germany, President Wilson's reply to the German appeal for an Armistice. It was as follows: —

"The Department of State,  
8th October, 1918

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge, on behalf of the President, your note of the 6th October, enclosing a communication from the German Government to the President; and I am instructed by the President to request you to make the following communication to the Imperial German Chancellor: —

Before making a reply to the request of the Imperial German Government, and in order that that reply shall be as candid and straightforward as the momentous interests involved require, the President of the United States deems it necessary to assure himself of the exact meaning of the note of the Imperial Chancellor. Does the Imperial Chancellor mean that the Imperial German Government accepts the terms laid down by the President in his address to the Congress of the United States on the 8th January last, and in subsequent addresses, and that its object in entering into discussions would be only to agree upon the practical details of their application? The President feels bound to say, with regard to the suggestion of an armistice, that he would not feel at liberty to propose a cessation of arms to the Governments with which the Government of the United States is associated against the Central Powers so long as the armies of those Powers are upon their soil. The good faith of any discussion would manifestly depend upon the consent of the Central Powers immediately to withdraw their forces everywhere from invaded territory.

The President also feels that he is justified in asking whether the Imperial Chancellor is speaking merely for the constituted authorities of the Empire who have so far conducted the War. He deems the answer to these questions vital from every point of view. Accept, Sir, the renewed assurances of my high consideration.

ROBERT LANSING."

At the last meeting of our Conference at Versailles, on October 10, we had before us the text of this reply.

M. Clemenceau said he thought it was an excellent document. Without consulting the Allies, President Wilson had demanded the evacuation of France, Belgium, Italy and Luxemburg. When a reply was received, it might suggest to us the discussion of armistice conditions. We naturally would then turn to our military advisers and ask what conditions they considered necessary. If we were to speak now without waiting to be asked, it would be a mistake, and would play into the hands of the Germans; hence he considered that our present position was quite satisfactory, and that no action need be taken.

I could not quite agree with this view. I pointed out that the speech in which Prince Max of Baden had defended and explained the German Peace Note to the Reichstag on October 5th was the speech of the Chief Minister of a defeated Empire. Had either Clemenceau or I made such a speech, the world would say that we were defeated. In Prince Max's place I would accept President Wilson's proposals without alteration. The Prince would no doubt readily accept the Fourteen Points; but there were matters in them which I would like to know a little more—for example, the Freedom of the Seas in war-time. This was quite unacceptable to the

British nation. Prince Max would also no doubt readily accept the evacuation of occupied territories as a condition of the armistice. In fact, the Germans were even now evacuating their territory, and it was only Marshal Foch who was delaying them and knocking them about in the process. A difficulty arose regarding the first point of the President's letter, because of the uncertainty of interpretation of the Fourteen Points; there was vagueness, for instance, about Alsace and Lorraine. His second point, however, dealing with the Armistice, was more serious, for if the Germans accepted this view, they could say they had accepted President Wilson's proposal, and if we had said nothing they could maintain that nobody had protested against it, and that they were entitled to regard it as the sum of the Allied conditions for an armistice.

I went on to point out that the American Government had formally sent us their reply, and we must send back some sort of answer. Moreover, the American reply had appeared in the Press before it reached the Governments. If we simply let the matter pass after this publication, and said nothing, I thought we should be, to a great extent, committed to it. Accordingly, I submitted to the Conference a rough draft I had made of the sort of reply which I felt we ought to send to Wilson. This was considered by the Conference, and on the basis of it a formal reply was drawn up and approved. The following is a translation of its text: —

“The Allied Governments have taken note with the greatest interest of the reply addressed by President Wilson to the Chancellor of the German Empire.

They appreciate the lofty sentiments which have inspired the reply. Confining themselves to the most urgent question, that of the Armistice, they share the opinion of the President of the United States, that the preliminary condition for any discussion of the question is the evacuation by the enemy of all invaded territories. But for the conclusion of the Armistice itself, they consider that this condition, essential though it is, is not sufficient.

It would not prevent the enemy from taking advantage of a suspension of hostilities to place himself, at the expiration of an armistice not followed by peace, in a better military situation than at the moment of the interruption of hostilities. They might be enabled to withdraw from a critical situation, to save their stores, to reform their units, to shorten their front, to retire without loss of men upon new positions which they would have time to select and fortify.

The conditions of an armistice can only be fixed after consultation with the military experts and in accordance with the military situation at the actual moment when negotiations are entered on.

These considerations have been strongly urged by the military



experts of the Allied Powers, and particularly by Marshal Foch. They equally concern all the armies of the Governments associated in the fight against the Central Empires.

The Allied Governments commend them to President Wilson or his fullest attention."

Along with this message we decided to send to the President a further telegram on the need for closer co-operation in the conduct of peace negotiations. This was as follows:—

"The Allied Governments venture to point out to President Wilson that time has come when decisions of supreme importance in regard to the War may have to be taken at very short notice. They therefore think it would be of very great assistance if an American representative possessing the full confidence of the United States Government could be sent to Europe to confer, when occasion arose, with the other associated Governments so as to keep them accurately and fully informed of the point of view of the United States Government."

It was clear that the end was now in sight. It was no less clear that we must move with the utmost care at this critical juncture, making sure of our footing at every stride, lest by a false step we should imperil the full harvest of our long effort. We wanted to make a clean sweep to the War, in such a manner that its lesson would be driven home and there would be no danger of it breaking out afresh. And, since President Wilson had hinted in his Reply to the German note, we were really still dealing with the old military Imperialist clique there. The democratisation of the German Government was at this stage no more than a dummy façade, imposed as an emergency war measure to enable the Emperor to meet Allied criticism. Its composition had in the end been determined by the reactionary retiring Chancellor, Hertig, and the new Chancellor, Prince Max, was selected by a Council of War and not nominated by a democratic body. The terms and the dispatch of the appeal for an armistice had been dictated by the Council of War. The hands might be sketchily gloved in a democratic pelt, but the voice was the voice of Ludendorff.

This situation has to be borne in mind in considering how it came about that hostilities were allowed to continue unchecked for more than a month after the Germans made their appeal for peace. All the world was panting for peace. Yet for weeks the fighting went on. The fact was that we did not feel ready to commit ourselves to negotiations with Ludendorff until we were in a position to ensure that our main peace terms were sure of acceptance. As for Wilson's Fourteen Points, they might be, and in the main were, in harmony with our desired terms, but they were in places phrased in the language of vague idealism which, in the absence of practical application,

made them capable of more than one interpretation. It was not sufficient for Germany to express readiness to negotiate on the basis of the Fourteen Points, unless we were in a position to insist on her accepting our exegesis of the sacred text.

The Policy Committee of the British War Mission in America produced on October 9th a Memorandum about the German Note—the first of many memoranda that were to be poured in from various advisory quarters on that theme—in which it underlined the fact that:—

“ . . . the pronouncements of President Wilson were a statement of attitude made before the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, the enforcement of the peace of Bukharest on Roumania, and the German statement of their intentions at the outset of the spring offensive. They cannot, therefore, be understood as a full recitation of the conditions of peace.

The phrasing of the German acceptance of them as a ‘ basis for peace negotiations ’ covers every variety of interpretation from sincere acceptance to that mere desire for negotiations which is the inevitable consequence of the existing military situation. It is therefore, impossible to grant any armistice to Germany which does not give the Entente full and acceptable guarantees that the terms arranged will be complied with. There must be a clear understanding that Germany accepts certain principles as indisputable, and reserves for negotiation only such details as, in the opinion of the Associated Powers, are negotiable.”

How truly we interpreted the temper of the German High Command at the moment when they launched their armistice proposals has since been admitted by Prince Max himself. In his *Memoirs* he states that:—

“ The Supreme Command had probably no clear idea at first of the fateful conditions to which the Fourteen Points must in any case commit Germany. They probably saw in Wilson’s programme a mere collection of phrases, which a skilful diplomat would be able to interpret at the conference table in a sense favourable to Germany. I had put them the question whether the Supreme Command were aware that the course they were entering upon might lead to the loss of colonies and even of German soil—in particular of Alsace-Lorraine and of the purely Polish districts of our eastern provinces. I received from them the evasive reply: ‘ The Supreme Command is ready to consider the cession of some small French-speaking parts of Alsace-Lorraine, if that is unavoidable. The cession of German territory on the eastern frontier is for them out of the question.’ At the last moment the Supreme Command tried to give expression to this mental reserve

ion of theirs, in the wording which they proposed for our Note: The German Government agrees that Wilson's Fourteen Points shall "serve as the basis of conversations". But the Ministers were—from their point of view rightly—of the opinion that no formulation should be used which would make Wilson suspicious and might provoke inconvenient questions. They supposed that they had avoided this in the final wording of the Note: as it afterwards appeared, they underrated the alertness of our opponents."\*

Dealing with opponents who asked for an armistice in so insincere frame of mind, it is obvious that we should never have secured those terms which we regarded as quite indispensable for a genuine peace—terms such as the full release and restoration of Belgium, the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, the rectification of Italian, Polish and Roumanian frontiers and so on—if they retained the power of effective refusal. Had they when asking for an armistice come forward with an honest, unequivocal offer in set terms to satisfy us these points, the case would have been different. But we were, as now known, quite right in suspecting that they had on October 4th no intention of agreeing to our demands. There was nothing for us but to fight on until they were compelled to accept armistice terms which put us in a position to insist on the objects which we had throughout the War openly announced to be those for which we were fighting.

The vague and unprecise character of the various speeches by President Wilson cited in the German Peace Note, if viewed as a final definition of the nature of the peace the Allies were prepared to make, was brought out in a Memorandum from the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office, produced on October 12th.

Meantime, the German Government issued on October 12th a reply to President Wilson's Note of October 8th. They declared that they "accepted the propositions laid down by President Wilson in his address of January 8th, and in his subsequent addresses as the foundation for a permanent peace of justice." They took it that the Allied Powers associated with America in the War also accepted these propositions. They were ready to evacuate the occupied territory as a condition of an armistice and suggested a mixed commission to supervise the arrangements for the evacuation. And they concluded with the assertion that the German Government represented the views of the majority of the Reichstag, and thus spoke for the German people.

It was unfortunate that these smooth approaches to peace by the German Government coincided with incidents which exasperated Allied opinion and were responsible for stiffening Allied demands. The German Army retreated in France and Belgium they deported

\* "Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden," Vol. II, p. 24.



civilian populations and wrought havoc and destruction on the property far beyond anything which military exigencies could warrant. Every fruit tree in the orchards, for instance, was ringed; even the innocent rose trees round cottage doors were often destroyed. At sea, not only did the practice of sinking ships without warning continue, but there was just at this time a crop of sinkings of passenger vessels with heavy loss of life. On October 10th the passenger steamer *Hiramo Maru* was sunk off the Irish coast, and of 320 persons on board, only 28 were saved; and on the same day the Irish Mail Boat *Leinster* was torpedoed without warning, and when beginning to sink was torpedoed a second time, thus being sunk in a few minutes with a loss of lives reported at the time as 520. There was a howl of indignation, which drowned the welcome that might otherwise have been given to the German Peace Note.

President Wilson replied at some length on October 14th to Germany. He made it clear that for armistice conditions they would have to deal with the military authorities on the Allied side, and that these conditions would have to "provide absolutely satisfactory safeguards and guarantees of the maintenance of the present military supremacy of the Armies of the United States and of the Allies in the field." He went on to draw attention to the German atrocities and to demand that they should cease.

"The President feels that it is also his duty to add that neither the Government of the United States nor, he is quite sure, the Governments with which the Government of the United States is associated as a belligerent will consent to consider an armistice so long as the armed forces of Germany continue the illegal and inhuman practices which they still persist in. At the very time that the German Government approaches the Government of the United States with proposals of peace, its submarines are engaged in sinking passenger ships at sea—and not the ships alone but the very boats in which their passengers and crews seek to make their way to safety; and in their present enforced withdrawal from Flanders and France the German Armies are pursuing a course of wanton destruction which has always been regarded as in direct violation of the rules and practices of civilised warfare. Cities and villages, if not destroyed, are being stripped not only of all their contents but often of their very inhabitants. The nations associated against Germany cannot be expected to agree to a cessation of armistice while acts of inhumanity, spoliation and desolation are being continued which they justly look upon with horror and with burning hearts."

He rounded off his Note by pointing out that this was the kind of thing we had learned to expect from the authorities which had hitherto controlled Germany; and if there was a real change in the

character of the German Government, he hinted that they should bring forth fruits meet for repentance if they wanted a merciful peace.

I received at this time a telegram from Sir Eric Geddes, then in the United States, reporting a talk he had had with the President, whose attitude, since receiving the last German Note, appeared to be moderating towards caution. The telegram which I read to the Cabinet on October 15th, stated that:—

“(a) President Wilson was fully alive to the need for continuing the prosecution of the War. He proposed shortly to announce the undiminished dispatch of troops and war effort of the United States.

(b) He realised that the time had arrived when consultation with the Allied Powers was essential.

(c) He had stated that our armistice terms, framed by naval and military officers, must be viewed in the spirit that undue humiliation would be inexcusable, except in so far as the enemy must be prevented from taking advantage of the armistice to re-form their forces and better their position.

(d) He inclined to take Germany to task for recent atrocities, e.g. the sinking of the *Leinster*.

(e) In talking of his Fourteen Points, the President's views on the Freedom of the Seas appeared to be unformed.

(f) The President had referred to the absolute necessity for the break-up of Austria, owing to commitments to oppressed nationalities.”

Sir Eric Geddes further recorded that the whole tone of the discussion had been most cordial, but that the President was outstandingly fearful, lest the naval and military authorities might urge an armistice so humiliating that the German nation could not accept it. His mind appeared to be set upon the kind of armistice which would leave no rancour, and demonstrate the high plane upon which the Allies stood.

In a Memorandum which he wrote on October 15th for the War Cabinet about the conditions of an armistice, Lord Curzon stressed the fact that from this stage onwards, any decision as to terms to be laid down for an armistice must be jointly discussed and settled among the Allies, not negotiated by the President alone. His memorandum went on to suggest that the Armistice ought to contain at a summary of the main items we should insist on in our peace terms—among which he referred not only to the matters contained in the Fourteen Points, but others which he thought should be included—surrender of Heligoland, the German Fleet and part of the mercantile marine; compensations, reparations, indemnities to the

Allies for the cost of the War; and the trial and punishment of the principal criminals, possibly including the Kaiser, unless abdicated. Lord Curzon's document was symptomatic of the hardening of the public attitude and its insistence upon an uncompromising victory.

In Germany, on the other hand, it was being slowly forced upon those in authority that they were facing certain defeat and were on the brink of collapse. Before sending his second Note to Wilson, Prince Max had held a consultation with Ludendorff, from which he was forced to conclude that if the Allies continued to attack without giving the Germans any respite, the German Army could not hold out, and might at any time be penetrated and broken up. In his Memoirs, Max states that he finally asked Ludendorff point blank: —

“ ‘If the present action should fail, could the War be carried on by us alone till the spring, in spite of the desertion of one of the two allies that remain to us?’ ”

I received the answer: ‘We need a breathing-space; after that we can re-form.’

‘In other words,’ I asked, ‘can we hold out if we do *not* obtain a breathing-space?’ and received the answer: ‘Yes, if we obtain a breathing-space, we can hold out.’

Our situation was therefore dark and difficult indeed.”\*

Prince Max declares that the real truth was that General Ludendorff believed he could hold the frontiers if the Army could be led back in good order, but not if it had been beaten back. Although he seriously thought the Allies would grant him an armistice that would enable him to carry out this manoeuvre. To get that armistice he would now have been willing to promise peace terms that would involve the loss of Alsace-Lorraine and payment of a heavy indemnity. It is clear therefore that from a military standpoint the German Army was not now in a position to guarantee continued resistance. On the political side, the home front was rapidly disintegrating. Up till the end of September the nation had been carefully blinded by the Supreme Command as to the seriousness of the situation. Not even the civilian Ministers had been given any inkling of its real gravity, and they were dumbfounded by Ludendorff's demand for an armistice. Up till the middle of July the German Army had been marching from victory to victory. Allied entrenchments were stormed, Allied fronts broken, Allied guns captured and hundreds of thousands of Allied troops made prisoners. The mass of the nation, that had suffered so long and so resolutely, with a grim confidence in their military leaders, which seemed to have been so brilliantly justified by the recent offensives

\* “Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden,” Vol. II, p. 68.



uld not understand the sudden change in the prospect, and they re utterly shattered by the publication of the Note to America. hey swung round to the deepest distrust of those who had hitherto en their idols—especially of Ludendorff, whom they dissociated m Hindenburg and recognised as the man who had dominated erman policy during the latter part of the War, whereas Hinden- rg rather embodied the nation's patriotic spirit. In this connection is interesting to recall a comment made by Marshal Foch, when I ked him his opinion in June 1918 about the two outstanding erman military leaders. What, I said, did he think of Ludendorff? is reply was: "*Un bon soldat!*" And how, I continued, would he scribe Hindenburg? He answered: "*Un grand patriote!*" The ass of the nation could no longer be relied on to support Ludendorff fresh military ventures. Prince Max toyed with the idea of a *réféc en masse* as an alternative to continuing the peace negotiations, t could find no one to support the suggestion.

The very broad hint contained at the end of Wilson's second ote, that there was not much hope of the War ending so long as the iser and his military advisers were in charge of Germany's policy, ed like a bombshell on public opinion there, and set all Berlin k about the possible abdication of the Kaiser. At a meeting of e German War Cabinet, held on October 17th to consider esident Wilson's latest Note, Ludendorff swung round to an ititude of intransigence; but Prince Max notes his own impression at Ludendorff, having in the first place compelled him to send e first Peace Note, now wanted to score credit for opposing tual surrender. "I cannot deny that the impression gained on me at General Ludendorff was less concerned to alter our decision an to register a protest against it."\*

Although at the meeting of October 17th Ludendorff sounded a te of optimism, he was unable to adduce any sound reason for it. e note written on the following day to Prince Max by Crown Prince apprecht gives a picture of the Army from which little optimism uld be deduced. He says:—

"Our troops are exhausted and their numbers have dwindled terribly. The number of infantry in an Active Service Division is seldom as much as 3,000. In general the infantry of a division can be treated as equivalent to one or two battalions, and in certain cases as only equivalent to two or three companies. Quantities of machine-guns have been lost, and there is a lack of trained machine-gun teams. The artillery has also lost a great number of guns and suffers from a lack of trained gun-layers. In certain armies 50 per cent. of the guns are without horses! There is also a lack of ammunition. . . .

\* "Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden," Vol. II, p. 157.

The morale of the troops has suffered seriously and their power of resistance diminishes daily. They surrender in hordes, wherever the enemy attacks, and thousands of plunderers infest the districts round the bases. . . .

I do not believe that there is any possibility of holding out over December. . . . Our situation is already exceedingly dangerous. . . . Ludendorff does not realise the whole seriousness of the situation. Whatever happens, we must obtain peace, before the enemy breaks through into Germany; if he does, woe on us! ”\*

Prince Max's first draft for a reply to President Wilson was rejected by the Cabinet as too abject, and for a short time it looked as though the military chiefs would demand his resignation—so little had the effective Government of Germany yet changed as a result of the pseudo-democratisation authorised by the Kaiser. Finally a Note in a less complaisant vein was drafted and agreed, and on October 20th it was sent off by Solf.

As regards the terms of the armistice for which Germany was asking, their Note accepted the condition that it should be arranged by military advisers, but demanded that “the present relative strength on the fronts must be made the basis of arrangements that will safeguard and guarantee it.” President Wilson was asked to have the matter settled on this basis, and to approve no demand “that would be irreconcilable with the honour of the German people and with paving the way to a peace of justice.” The Note went on to deny the charges of illegal and inhuman practices on land or sea, but promised to order U-boat commanders not to sink passenger ships in future. In conclusion, it asserted that the new Government involved a fundamental change in the constitution of Germany, and that a Bill had been introduced to make the decision on war and peace subject to approval by the Reichstag.

To this note Wilson replied on October 23rd. He accepted the German promise to observe the humane rules of civilised warfare, and also their assertion that their Government included Ministers representing the Reichstag majority and the opinion of the nation.

But as for the Armistice terms, he declared that:—

“The only Armistice he would feel justified in submitting for consideration would be one which should leave the United States and the Powers associated with her in a position to enforce any arrangements that may be entered into, and to make a renewal of hostilities on the part of Germany impossible.”

So he was sending the correspondence to the Associated Governments, for their military advisers to work out Armistice terms, such

\* “Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden,” Vol. II, p. 157.

"will fully protect the interests of the peoples involved and assure to the Associated Governments the unrestricted power to safeguard and enforce the details of the peace. . . ." He went on to point out that he did not put much confidence in the professed change of Government; that the world could not trust the word of those who had hitherto dictated German policy, and that if the United States had to deal:—

"with the military masters and the monarchical autocrats of Germany now, or if it is likely to have to deal with them later in regard to the international obligations of the German Empire, it must demand, not peace negotiations but surrender."

As a matter of fact, quite irrespective of his final dig at the German autocracy, Wilson had intimated in this note that the armistice terms would involve a complete surrender by the Central Powers. But when news of the terms of his reply got abroad among the German people, there were clamours from many quarters for the Kaiser's abdication as a means to secure better terms for the country. Even prominent military figures like Colonel von Maercken were eager that Wilhelm should abdicate before he was forced to do so by popular clamour. Ludendorff, on the other hand, issued a defiant order to the Army calling on them to refuse Wilson's terms. On this Prince Max asked the Kaiser to dismiss Ludendorff. He did so on the 26th, and on the following day a further note was despatched by Germany to the President, asserting that the constitution was being duly changed as he had required, and that the military powers were now subject to it. Accordingly, the German Government:

"now awaits proposals for an Armistice, which shall be a first step towards a just peace, as the President has described it in his proclamations."

After this, the next step as regarded Germany rested with the Allied Governments and their military advisers, to whom Wilson had passed the previous correspondence on October 23rd. Some few days had to elapse while each of the Allied Governments considered its attitude and while arrangements were being made for them to meet together in conference to discuss the situation.



## CHAPTER LXXXV (*continued*)

### HOW PEACE CAME

#### 2. THE TERMS OF THE ARMISTICE

THE British Government had been following the developments of the situation with the closest attention. They were anxious not to prolong the slaughter one hour beyond the moment when victory was so assured that the Germans could not by a short period of respite put a complete triumph in jeopardy. If a few more weeks would place the Allies in that position then a premature armistice would be a blunder. On the other hand, if the German Army were still capable of holding on behind the Rhine until the winter came and the condition of the roads made a further advance impracticable then we should have to face the prospect of a renewal of the campaign in 1919. With the Germans driven out of France and Belgium I was more than doubtful whether public opinion either in Britain or in France would face the sacrifices of another campaign merely to force Germany to disgorge her Eastern conquests. Our decision as to the terms of the Armistice therefore depended on the military prospects. I invited the Commander-in-Chief to come over to London to enlighten the Government on this subject. On October 19th, Marshal Haig attended a meeting of the War Cabinet and gave us his views on the military position and the prospects of a satisfactory armistice. He confirmed Sir Henry Wilson's appreciation in every particular. The statement he made to the Cabinet on this occasion had a special interest as showing how little weight our military leaders attached to the abandonment of Germany by her allies. Their minds were focused on the trenches in front of them, they had no eyes for the facts and considerations outside which were directly responsible for the immediate collapse of the German resistance. Sir Douglas Haig gave us a pessimistic appreciation of the military situation which is extraordinary in view of the actual condition of the German Army. Here is a resumé of his statement:—

“ In the event of the enemy asking for an armistice the nature of the reply should depend greatly on the answers which we can make to the two following questions:—

1. Is Germany so beaten that she will accept any terms dictated by the Allies?

2. Can the Allies continue to press the enemy sufficiently vigorously during the coming winter months to cause him to withdraw so quickly that he cannot destroy the railways, roads, etc., up to the German frontier?

A very large part of the German Army has been badly beaten, but the whole Field Army has not yet been broken up. Owing to the large number of Divisions of which it consists, *general disorganisation* (which follows a decisive defeat) is not yet apparent.

In my opinion the German Army is capable of retiring to its own frontiers and holding that line against equal or even superior forces.

The length of that line is about 235 miles as against the front of 400 miles which he was holding only a week ago.

The situation of the Allied Armies is as follows:—

The French Army seems greatly worn out. Many of the rank and file seem to feel that the War has been won. Lille, Roubaix, Tourcoing and other big centres of industry have been taken. Reports say that many of their men are disinclined to risk their lives. Certainly neither on the right nor on the left of the British have the French attacked vigorously during the last six weeks. Even in July it was the British and American divisions which carried the French forward on the Marne. Next year a large proportion of the French Armies will probably be Black!

*American Army* is disorganised, ill-equipped and ill-trained with very few N.C.O.'s and officers of experience. It has suffered severely through ignorance of modern war and it must take *at least a year* before it becomes a serious fighting force.

*The British Army* has fought hard. It is a veteran force, very confident in itself but its infantry is already 50,000 under strength. If infantry effectives could be maintained and rest given during winter it would remain what it is now, the most formidable fighting force in the world. On the other hand with diminishing effectives we must expect morale to decline.

If the French and American Armies were capable of a serious offensive, *now*, the Allies could completely overthrow the remaining efficient enemy divisions before they could reach the line of the Meuse.

They are not. We must reckon with that fact as well as with the fact that the British Army alone is not sufficiently fresh or strong to force a decision by itself.

This means that the Allies are not in a position to prevent the enemy from doing an immense amount of material damage to railways, roads, etc., during the winter months *and during his retirement*.

The advance of the Allies, when active operations again begin, will, therefore, be greatly hampered and progress must be slow.

In the coming winter, too, the enemy will have several months for recuperation, and absorption of the 1920 class, untouched as yet.

So we must conclude that the enemy will be able to hold the line which he selects for defence for some time after the campaign of 1919 commences."\*

Having regard to the fact that we were within a fortnight or three weeks, at the outside, of the complete break-up of the German Army, and that all Germany's allies had already given up the struggle, Haig's view of the military prospects was, to say the least, unduly restrained. He advised us that in his view it would be best to offer armistice terms which involved no more than the retirement of the enemy to his own frontiers, evacuating Belgium, France and Alsace-Lorraine, and returning the commandeered Belgian rolling stock and deported Belgian citizens. If Germany rejected satisfactory peace terms we could then resume the War in 1919 on enemy soil.

Mr. Bonar Law pointed out that such terms really amounted to complete defeat, and that in the military situation which Haig described there was nothing which should compel the Germans to accept such terms.

The Field-Marshal's reply to this was that:—

"the enemy might think that the Allies were stronger than they were in reality."

Discussion followed as to the naval terms we might hope to impose, and also as to the state of the German morale, which I pointed out was the crucial issue at this stage. Feeling was general that it was unlikely hostilities would be resumed once the "cease fire" had sounded; and on that account we ought to hold pledges for the fulfilment of our peace terms. Milner suggested occupying the Western Rhineland, and Wilson the Saar; but I remarked that on the evidence furnished by Field-Marshal Haig, the Germans were not sufficiently defeated to concede such terms. In that case the continuance of the blockade would be our most effectual guarantee.

We passed under review the military terms which Foch had suggested for an armistice, and the naval terms which our Admiralty demanded. These anticipated the main features of the Armistice ultimately imposed, and I pointed out that they amounted to abject

\* His estimate of the contribution made by the French Army is very ungenerous, seeing that the total casualties suffered by the French between July and November, 1918, were 531,000, as compared with 411,000 suffered by the British—and that, after France had already suffered some 2,157,000 casualties in the previous fighting.



surrender. I asked Haig what would be the effect on our Army if we insisted on such terms and the enemy refused them. He hinted that the effect on their morale would be bad. As to a continuance of the blockade, Mr. Bonar Law doubted whether America would agree to it if the Germans surrendered their submarines.

On the whole, the military advice we obtained did not encourage us to expect an immediate termination of the War. All our plans and preparations at that date were therefore made on the assumption of all our military advisers that the War would certainly not conclude before 1919. We were not fully informed as to the internal conditions in Germany and we underestimated the effect of the Balkan and Turkish victories on the military situation. Our military counsellors attached little importance to the events in the East which the German Staff considered decisive. If Haig and Wilson correctly read the military situation on October 19th, it would not, at that date, have been possible to conclude an armistice which would afford any satisfactory guarantee to the Allies that their essential peace terms would be attained, or that we might not find the enemy at the end of it in a stronger position for defying us and holding out against us than he had been when hostilities were broken off.

Matters had advanced a stage further when the Cabinet assembled to review the situation on the morning of October 24th. In the meantime, the German Note of October 20th had been sent to President Wilson, and he had answered it on the 23rd as already noted. We had before us the text of Wilson's latest note to Germany, though his official communication to us was not yet to hand. I stated that I welcomed the terms of his reply and liked the tenor of the President's proposals. If Germany meant peace, she would accept, and the acceptance would be equivalent to military surrender. I was glad that the diplomatic wrangle was over, and that the President had made it clear that the terms of an armistice must be such as would prevent the resumption of hostilities by the Germans.

The general opinion of the Cabinet was in accord with this view. Mr. Bonar Law expressed his pleasure that President Wilson had been firm enough when it came to the point to insist on what practically amounted to unconditional surrender. Some members of the Ministry were impatient with Wilson's attempts to interfere with the internal affairs of Germany. Their view was that democratic government was no guarantee against war, though it checked the tendency to plot and prepare for war. Further discussion was adjourned until the President's official communication to the Allied Governments should be available. A good deal of preliminary work had already been done in examining the problem of an armistice. Lloyd's terms were confined to the position on land. On October 20th, Mr. Balfour submitted a Memorandum suggesting further points for the armistice, such as the surrender of the German Navy,

and the occupation of parts of Germany other than those it was proposed to detach—such as Alsace-Lorraine—with a view to holding them as pledges for payment of reparations and the settlement of the eastern frontier. On October 22nd, Lord Fisher submitted a characteristic memorandum of five naval points he wished to see dealt with:—

1. The German High Sea Fleet to be delivered up intact.
2. Ditto—Every German submarine.
3. Ditto—Heligoland.
4. Ditto—The two flanking islands of Sylt and Boikum.
5. No spot of German Jesuitry in the wide world to be permitted: It would infallibly be a Submarine base."

The Ministry of Shipping, the Air Ministry, and the War Office all submitted memoranda indicating the points which they wanted to see covered by the armistice terms.

On the other hand, we had two Notes laid before us by General Smuts on October 23rd and 24th, in which he accepted without doubt or demur Haig's estimate of the military position. We have seen in previous chapters how very greatly this otherwise acute observer had fallen under the spell of G.H.Q. opinion. In view of the account of the military situation given to the Government by Haig on October 19th which I have described above, Smuts thought we were foolish to suppose that Germany would sign an armistice that involved a surrender. His memorandum of October 23rd declared that:—

"The result of these discussions on an armistice is that the various drafts before us differ in no material respect from an unconditional surrender, which is not justified by the present relative military positions of the belligerents. . . .

An armistice conference between the military leaders on these lines is, therefore, bound to prove abortive. . . ."

Accordingly, he urged that instead of concluding an armistice we should make peace—put forward moderate peace terms on the lines of the Fourteen Points and get Germany to accept them while hostilities still continued—unless we intended to carry on the War into 1919. In his second Memorandum of the following day, he continues in this strain, reminding us of:—

"the very sober statement which Sir Douglas Haig made to the Cabinet on the 19th October, and which inspires no extravagant hopes for the immediate future from purely military effort on the Western Front."

In this second memorandum he warned us against trying to defeat Germany, as that might mean dragging on the War for another year. There was considerable shrewdness and foresight in his warning against the disintegration of Central Europe which had now come imminent:—

“There is serious danger that the bad, but more or less orderly, political pre-War system of Europe may give place to a wild disorder of jarring and warring state fragments, such as we now see on a vast scale in Russia. . . . What is going to happen when, as now seems probable, Austria breaks up and becomes a ‘Balkans’ on a vaster scale? With the creation of an ‘independent’ Poland, there will be a chain of these discordant fragments right across Europe from Finland in the north to Turkey in the south. No League of Nations could hope to prevent a wild war-dance of these so-called free nations in future. . . .”

In the economic realm, though not as yet in the martial, we have witnessed in post-War Europe that wild war-dance of the new powers which Smuts foretold, but the smaller States who were liberated by the Treaty are not mainly or largely responsible. The most serious trouble has been created by the rivalries, jealousies and disagreements of the greater powers of Europe and Asia. Smuts wanted us to make the best peace we could, without demanding surrender from Germany.

“The popular cry for justice is very insistent but two governing considerations should be kept steadily in view. Firstly, the evil of continuing the War is rapidly beginning to outweigh the good to be achieved by a more complete measure of victory or justice. Secondly, the British Empire should not pursue justice at the expense of its own legitimate future. . . .”

That last observation sounds a little cynical. But Smuts doubtless had in mind the advice of Ecclesiastes:—

“Be not righteous overmuch . . . why shouldest thou destroy thyself?”

He was misled by Haig and Wilson into failing to realise how capable Germany was of prolonging the struggle. Beyond question, it was a disaster that we had to lay Germany prostrate before we could reach a peace settlement. Had Ludendorff retreated earlier along strong lines within the German frontier and there held out terms to us, a peace settlement might have been reached that contained fewer roots of bitterness than one dictated to a foe who even



in defeat clung with his claws to the foreign lands he had invaded and devastated and in the process of liberating his hold increased the desolation. Unhappily, for the peace of the world, the hostile armies were still on the soil of France and Belgium when the end came, and the surrender had to be complete enough to guarantee the aims for which we fought.

While the Allies were considering with their military advisers what form the Armistice terms should take, Germany's remaining associates were tumbling down. Turkey had addressed a Peace Note to President Wilson as far back as October 14th, patterned on those of Germany and Austria. But we dropped him a hint that as Turkey was on the point of collapse, he need do no more than refer her to whichever Allied commander, naval or military, of the forces attacking her, she cared to approach, to receive our terms for an armistice.

The Turkish Armistice led to the only real unpleasantness I ever had with Clemenceau. At this time, while the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Naval forces in the Mediterranean was French, the naval forces located in the Aegean were under a British Admiral, Sir S. A. Gough-Calthorpe. When a prospect arose in October of an early victory over Turkey, the question was discussed at our Conference of October 9th as to who should command the Allied naval forces operating at Constantinople. We naturally insisted that he should be British, in view of the fact that the Allied Fleet in the Aegean was at least 75 per cent. British, and that this country had been responsible for practically all the military operations against Turkey—alike at Gallipoli, in Egypt and Palestine, and in Mesopotamia. Clemenceau was anxious to put a French Admiral in charge, and the French representative at Versailles held out for this. Accordingly I wrote a strong letter to Clemenceau on October 15th urging him to agree without further delay to our proposition. In this letter I pointed out that:—

“ We have taken by far the larger part of the burden of the war against Turkey in the Dardanelles and in Gallipoli, in Egypt, in Mesopotamia and in Palestine. The British Government has agreed that the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in France should be a French General; it has agreed that the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in the Balkans should be a French General. I do not see how I could possibly justify to the people of the British Empire that at the moment when the final attack upon Turkey was to be delivered, the command of the Naval Forces which are overwhelmingly British, in a theatre of war associated with some of the most desperate and heroic fighting by troops from nearly every part of the British Empire, should be handed over to a French Admiral as well.”

Clemenceau replied on the 21st asserting that if we had borne the lion's share of the fighting against the Turks we had to that extent been compelled to limit the help we might otherwise have given them in France! And he declared that as France was Turkey's principal creditor, and most of the banks and business concerns in Constantinople were French owned, they had the greatest interest here. He had agreed that General Milne should command the operations in the Balkans against Turkey; he could not agree that the naval operations should also be in British hands.

I sent him an emphatic reply on October 25th, in which I answered his arguments, point by point, and ended by saying: —

“The British Government have agreed to a French Commander-in-Chief on the Western Front; they have agreed to a French Commander-in-Chief in the Balkans; they have agreed to a French Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean. Unless it is to be contended that unity of command means that one nation alone among the Allies is to have not only the supreme but the subordinate command wherever Allied forces are employed on a common enterprise together, I do not understand why it is that you wish to deprive the British of a naval command which they have exercised ever since 1915 in order that a French Admiral may be placed in control of an expedition, three-quarters of which is British in material and personnel. I assure you that insistence on such a view must inevitably imperil the operation of the all-important principle of unity of command in every department of the War, for public opinion will never tolerate the relinquishment by the British of the naval command in a theatre in which the British arms have throughout the War made the heaviest sacrifices, and to which the people, not of Great Britain alone but of Australia, New Zealand and India, have sent so many of their sons to die. I earnestly trust, therefore, that you will see your way to consent to the arrangement whereby the command in the Aegean and of the attack on Constantinople by sea is to remain in the hands of a British Admiral acting under the general direction of the Allied Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean.”

Unquestionably the French were, at this time, very jealous of the position we had won in Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia, and were most anxious to keep in their own hands all the negotiations in the Balkans and with Turkey. The Turks, on the other hand, preferred to do their business with us. The upshot was that Turkey short-circuited my dispute with Clemenceau by directly approaching Admiral Calthorpe at Mudros with a request for an armistice. On October 20th, General Townshend, who had remained in Turkish hands since the fall of Kut on April 29th, 1916, arrived at Mudros as an emissary from Isset Pasha to ask for peace terms. Calthorpe

cabled us the news, informing us also that the Turks particularly wanted to deal with us, not with the French, and that:—

“the effect of a Fleet under French command going up to Constantinople would be deplorable, nor could anything be more unpopular with the Greeks in Turkey. General Townshend thinks that the Turks would be willing to send plenipotentiaries now to treat for peace with British representatives and that they would allow the British to take over the Forts of the Dardanelles if they were assured of support against the Germans in Turkey and the Black Sea.”

Calthorpe was told to inform the Turkish Government that he was empowered to sign an armistice, and on October 26th, three envoys from Turkey reached Mytilene and were brought to Mudros. The main features of the armistice terms to be granted to Turkey had already been settled, as we have seen, at the Inter-Allied Conference of October 7th-9th.

The French, on learning of this, promptly sent their Admiral Amet to associate himself with Calthorpe in the negotiations; but Calthorpe firmly refused to share the business with him. The discussions were long and difficult. The Turks particularly objected to Clause 1 of the proposed terms, which involved Allied occupation of the Dardanelles and Bosphorus forts. They said they would rather dismantle them and in any case would never agree to Greeks occupying them and they had an almost equal objection to Italians. On our instructions, Calthorpe gave an undertaking that only British and French troops would take part in this occupation, and in the small hours of the morning of October 29th, Calthorpe wired us that subject to Constantinople agreeing to Clause 1 in the light of this guarantee, the armistice was now agreed. It was, in fact, signed on October 30th, and Turkey withdrew from the War.

On that day I was attending an Inter-Allied Conference in Paris and I reported to it that the Armistice would be signed before evening. Clemenceau and his Foreign Secretary, Pichon, at once raised the question of Calthorpe's action in refusing to associate Admiral Amet with himself in the conduct of the negotiations, and a somewhat heated argument ensued, the French taking their stand on the legal point that the supreme command in the Mediterranean was held by them, while I maintained that the local command in the Aegean, and the whole of the operations against Turkey, were in British hands. There was a certain amount of recrimination, and I see that the official minutes record me as remarking at one point of the discussion that:—

“except for Great Britain no one had contributed anything more than a handful of black troops to the expedition in Palestine.



was really surprised at the lack of generosity on the part of the French Government. The British had now some 500,000 men on Turkish soil. The British had captured three or four Turkish Armies and had incurred hundreds of thousands of casualties in the war with Turkey. The other Governments had only put in a few nigger policemen to see that we did not steal the Holy Sepulchre! When, however, it came to signing an armistice, all this fuss was made."

Mr. Balfour supported me, and declared that if the French made a point of it, we would refer the question to Versailles for a general ruling whether an armistice must be signed by representatives of all the Allies. The armistice with Bulgaria had been negotiated by Franchet d'Esperey single-handed, Milne not having been associated with him, although the Bulgarian peace overtures had been made to the British Government. In the end, Clemenceau consulted with Pichon and then said that as in this case the armistice had probably been signed already they would agree to accept the *fait accompli*, and the incident closed.

While the negotiations with Turkey were being concluded yet another of our enemies, Austria-Hungary, was suing out her armistice. The Italian advance of Vittorio Veneto had begun on October 24th, and on the 29th an Austrian officer crossed the Italian lines with a white flag, asking for armistice terms. He only represented the local Austrian general, not their Commander-in-Chief, so he was sent back; but next day a fully accredited mission arrived under a flag of truce.

The Austrian Peace Note of October 4th to President Wilson had been answered by him on October 18th with the statement that his Fourteen Points no longer applied to Austria in their original form, as he had since recognised the independence of the Czecho-Slovaks and the Yugo-Slavs. On October 27th, they replied that they were willing to accept this; but there was no need for him thereafter to refer them to the military for armistice terms, as their necessities drove them to do this spontaneously. On 1st November, the Pope sent to us a special appeal on behalf of the crumbling Empire. This was:—

"The Holy Father, in his most earnest desire to see an end put as soon as possible to the War which for too long has devastated Europe, begs His Britannic Majesty's Government to give benevolent and immediate consideration to the request for a separate peace put forward by Austria-Hungary. After a request of this nature, the cessation of the sanguinary conflict appears to be imperiously called for by every principle of humanity.

Further, the August Pontiff, with a strong feeling for the sufferings of poor prisoners of war, especially on the approach of severe

weather, trusts that, thanks especially to the noble and efficacious intervention of His Majesty's Government, these unfortunate people can by both parties be restored to their families."

When we received this Note, the negotiations for an armistice were already well under weigh, and our Inter-Allied Conference at Paris had given place to a meeting of the Supreme War Council at Versailles, where the actual terms were being agreed. They were drastic. M. Clemenceau himself remarked of the naval terms that "they had left the breeches of the Emperor and nothing else!" But Austria was in no mood to boggle at the conditions. On November 3rd, the armistice was signed, and hostilities ceased on the following day.

There was a meeting of Allied Premiers, Clemenceau, Orlando and myself at Colonel House's rooms in Paris when the fate of the Austrian armistice was in the balance. We were discussing the conditions to be imposed on Germany. We decided to adjourn the discussions to the following morning in the confident expectation that by the following day there would be some definite news as to the Austrian negotiations. I had packed up my papers and was passing through the front garden of the house when Sir Maurice Hankey rushed after me to tell me that a telegram had just arrived announcing the acceptance by Austria of the Allied terms. I returned and found Clemenceau, Orlando, Sonnino and House in a state of ebullient excitement. Orlando was in tears, the stern Sonnino was radiant and even the iron-hearted Frenchman was overcome with emotion.

It is curious, looking backward on the situation as it presented itself at that time, to recall that on October 29th, Baron Sonnino was acutely alarmed lest we should come to terms with Germany before doing so with Austria. He was terrified that in that case the German Armies would put on Austrian uniform and turn round on Italy! So little did he realise either the utter war-weariness of Austria—far intenser, more pervasive than that of Germany—or Germany's disgust with allies who had during 1918 fought with a white feather whilst Germany was making such desperate efforts to retrieve the fortunes of the Central Alliance.

The elimination of both Turkey and Austria-Hungary left the field clear for us to concentrate on terms for Germany. The armistice terms, naval and military, were carefully examined and approved by the Supreme War Council. By the afternoon of November 4th, the Council had agreed to the text of the armistice to be offered, and had also adopted resolutions as to the further military steps to be taken against Germany, should she decline to sign the armistice.

These included the establishment of an Allied line along the

German-Austrian frontier, the massing of Czechs and Slovaks in Bohemia and Galicia, bringing up the Salonika forces under General Franchet d'Esperey through the Balkans, and carrying out heavy bombing operations by means of aerodromes set up in Bohemia. Had events compelled us to carry out this programme, there can be no question that Germany would have been invaded from the south before the end of the year.

The Council further adopted the text of a note to President Wilson, communicating to him the terms of the proposed armistice, and inviting him to notify the German Government that they should apply to Marshal Foch with the object of negotiating a suspension of hostilities. A protracted and somewhat lively discussion took place as to whether we should accompany this note by any statement making it clear that we should not consider ourselves bound to adhere to the letter of the President's Fourteen Points in the subsequent framing of peace terms. In particular, the British Government could not accept the President's attitude about the Freedom of the Seas in war-time; and when we raised this point the French and Italians proceeded to bring forward their own objections to other items. We had a series of conversations with Colonel House, Wilson's representative in Paris, about these matters. Clemenceau prepared an elaborate memorandum criticising the Fourteen Points in detail, which he wanted to send to Washington, and Sonnino had a memorandum on the subject of Italian frontiers, which, however, after much difficulty we were able to persuade him did not arise in connection with an armistice with Germany. Eventually, we managed to secure agreement on the wording of a Note prepared by me to accompany our message to President Wilson, which ran as follows:—

“The Allied Governments have given careful consideration to the correspondence which has passed between the President of the United States and the German Government. Subject to the qualifications which follow, they declare their willingness to make peace with the Government of Germany on the terms of peace laid down in the President's address to Congress of the 8th January, 1918, and the principles of settlement enunciated in his subsequent addresses. They must point out, however, that Clause 2, relating to what is usually described as the Freedom of the Seas, is open to various interpretations, some of which they could not accept.

They must therefore reserve to themselves complete freedom on this subject when they enter the Peace Conference.

Further, in the conditions of peace laid down in his Address to Congress of the 8th January, 1918, the President declared that the invaded territories must be restored as well as evacuated and



freed, and the Allied Governments feel that no doubt ought to be allowed to exist as to what this provision implies. By it they understand that compensation will be made by Germany for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allies and their property by the aggression of Germany by land, by sea, and from the air."

On receiving our communication, President Wilson addressed, on November 5th, 1918, a further note to Germany, in which he referred to his previous note of the 23rd and stated that he had now heard from the Associated Governments their views on the correspondence that had passed between Germany and himself. He quoted the text of the above memorandum from us, and said that he was in agreement with the interpretation of his views given in its concluding paragraph. And he ended by telling Germany that Marshal Foch was authorised by the Governments of the United States and the Allies to receive accredited representatives of the German Government and communicate to them the terms of an armistice.

Although we were confident of ultimately compelling the Germans to surrender, we were, at this stage, far from sure that they would be prepared without making further resistance to accept the very drastic terms which had been agreed at Versailles. When I was there I asked Foch whether he thought they would sign. He said he did not, but in any case he would be able to overpower the Germans by Christmas.

However, the stage was now set for the final act of the drama. Government in Germany was in a state of chaos. The fleet had mutinied at the end of October, rather than go out to fight. The Kaiser had fled to Spa, to take refuge with his army. Prince Max, the Chancellor, had been laid low with influenza, and an overdose of a sleeping draught sent him into a coma for 36 critical hours, from the 1st to the 3rd of November. He woke to find that Germany's remaining allies, Turkey and Austria-Hungary, were both out of the War, and that rioting, stimulated by Bolshevik agitators, was breaking out all over Germany. President Wilson's note of November 5th left no doubt that the armistice terms prepared for Germany would be severe. But they had no option but to appeal for them. General Groener, who had taken over on Ludendorff's dismissal, found the army in a hopelessly chaotic state, while the defection of Germany's Allies left her defenceless on her southern frontier. On November 6th, Erzberger headed a delegation of *parlementaires* dispatched by the German Government to Foch. On the morning of Friday, November 8th, they arrived at the railway carriage in the Forest of Compiègne where Marshal Foch, representing the armies of the Allies, and Admiral Wemyss, representing the navies, awaited them.

"What do you want, gentlemen?" asked Foch. "Your proposals for an armistice," they replied. "Oh, we're not making any proposals for an armistice," said Foch. "We are quite happy to go on fighting." The German delegates looked at one another. "But we must have terms," they protested. "We cannot continue the conflict." "Ah! you come to ask for an armistice? That is a different thing!"

Foch handed over to them the armistice terms drafted by the Supreme War Council, and told them they could have 72 hours, until 11.0 a.m. on November 11th, to sign them. The delegates withdrew to study them, and were appalled at their severity. The terms, in fact, amounted to a demand for Germany's utter surrender, on a scale which would leave her quite defenceless and incapable of undertaking any resistance to whatever peace terms might be imposed. The delegates dared not sign them, and asked permission—which was granted—to send a messenger to their Government to get instructions.

The messenger returned to a country that was in dire confusion. As far back as October 31st, Scheidemann, the leader of the majority Socialists, had put it to Prince Max that the prompt, voluntary abdication of the Kaiser was vital to enable the home front to be saved, and only Prince Max's sleeping draught prevented him at that time from placing definite proposals to that effect before Wilhelm. In the interval, revolt and sedition had gathered head. It had ceased to be a question of saving the monarchy—it was dubious whether settled government itself could be saved from a Bolshevik revolution. From 6th November, Prince Max was pleading with the Kaiser to resign. By the morning of the 9th he learned that revolutionary sentiment had impregnated not only the town mobs but the Army itself to such an extent that the soldiers could not be relied on to defend the Emperor or to maintain civil order. The Supreme Army Command advised the Kaiser to resign, and Prince Max, hearing that he had agreed to do so, issued a statement to this effect before receiving any official confirmation of the fact. Wilhelm fled to Holland, and the German messenger who brought back news of the Armistice terms found behind the front line—where German soldiers were still fighting with tenacious valour—a land of utter disorder, and a new Socialist Government of a German Republic, sitting bewildered in the high places where till yesterday an Emperor and the Kings and Princes of ancient royal houses had reigned as supreme hereditary autocrats.

The terms might be hard, but there was no one to gainsay them. The heads of the Army could no longer count upon all its units to continue a fight every soldier in it knew to be hopeless. It is said that many of them were seduced by political influences. Maybe so, but these would not have counted had the spirit of the Army not

been depressed by a sense of disillusionment and discouragement which bordered on despair. And there was no great leader, either civilian or soldier, to rally them with the inspiration of his personality. The Kaiser, Hindenburg and Ludendorff rolled into one would not make a single Frederick the Great who could mobilise and magnetise all the resources of a hard pressed and exhausted nation to struggle triumphantly against great odds. Neither Prince Max nor Scheidemann possessed the dramatic and oratorical powers of a Gambetta to stir up a vanquished people to a desperate resistance against the victors, and there was no Hitler on the horizon to rouse in the youth of Germany the spirit of sacrifice for the Fatherland. The inevitable result was that in defeat the heads of the civil Government could no longer rely upon the obedience of the civil population. Such governing and administrative capacity as could still make itself felt in Germany would be urgently needed, not for fighting her neighbours but for saving her own civilisation.

Word was telegraphed back to the Forest of Compiègne, authorising Erzberger and his colleagues to sign the Armistice. They did so at 5.0 a.m. on November 11th, and at 11.0 a.m. the cannon-fire ceased along the battle front from the Dutch marches to the mountain ramparts of Switzerland. After more than four and a quarter years, the Great War was ended.

The progress of the talks at Compiègne during the two preceding days had been followed by us with an eager hope. Certain of the items in the proposed armistice had called forth strong protest and counter-argument from the German delegates, and in deference to their submissions, a few modifications were introduced. But even so, the conditions were very far-reaching. They included the evacuation by the German military forces not only of all the invaded territories of Belgium, Luxemburg, and France, and of Alsace-Lorraine, but of all German territory west of the Rhine and a strip ten kilometres wide on the east bank, and of bridge-heads with a 30 kilometres radius to the east of Mainz, Coblenz and Cologne; repatriation of all hostages and return of prisoners of war; surrender of large quantities of war material and transport material; withdrawal in Eastern Europe from all territory outside the 1914 German frontier and denunciation of the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest; replacement of all cash and securities taken from Belgium and all gold taken from Russia and Roumania as indemnities or otherwise; the handing over of all submarines and of a large part of their fleet, and disarmament of the remainder. If, on account of the mutiny of the fleet, the German Government proved unable to fulfil all the naval clauses of the Armistice in time, we reserved the right to occupy Heligoland as a pledge.

In a despatch which he sent me on the evening of November 9th, Clemenceau gave a characteristically terse and ruthless account of



the discussions then in progress. He had just seen Foch who had told him how things were going. The Germans, he said:—

“made no observations either as regards bridge-heads or fleet. They dwelt on the fact that Germany is on the verge of Bolshevism unless we assist them to resist and that we ourselves will subsequently be invaded by the same scourge. They requested to be allowed to retire more slowly from the left bank of the Rhine, stating that it was necessary for them to form an army to oppose Bolshevism and re-establish order. Foch replied that they would be permitted to constitute this army on the right bank. They further objected that we were depriving them of too many machine-guns and that they would not have sufficient to fire on their own men. Foch replied that they still had their rifles. They inquired our intended procedure on the left bank of the Rhine. Foch replied that he did not know and that in any case it was not their business. They finally requested to be supplied with food, stating that they were on the verge of starvation. Foch replied that in that case it would be sufficient for them to place their tonnage in our pool and in that manner they could obtain supplies. They thereupon requested to be given free passes for their ships. They complained that we were confiscating too many engines as at the present moment their own were scattered. Foch replied that we were only asking for what they had taken from us. They appeared much depressed. From time to time a sob escaped Winterfeld. Under these conditions the signature of the Armistice does not appear doubtful. . . .”

At 6.30 p.m. on November 10th, a wireless message was sent by the German G.H.Q. to their delegates with Foch, which said:—

“The German Government transmits to (German) G.H.Q. the following document; For Secretary of State Erzberger—Your Excellency is empowered to sign the Armistice. You will at the same time make the following formal declaration:

‘The German Government will undertake to carry out all the conditions laid down. At the same time the undersigned feel obliged to point out that the fulfilment of some points of these conditions will drive into a famine the population of those parts of Germany which will not be occupied. By leaving all provisions which were intended for the troops in the areas to be evacuated, by restricting the means of communication and at the same time keeping up the blockade (which is equivalent to the withholding of food) any effort at dealing with the food question and organising the same is made impossible. The

undersigned therefore request that negotiations will be allowed on these points and that they will be so altered that proper nourishment will be assured.' ”

Ten minutes later, another message came from Berlin, in confirmation, saying: —

“ The German Government to the German plenipotentiaries with the Allied Armies. The German Government accepts the Armistice terms offered to it on the 8th November.

(signed) IMPERIAL CHANCELLOR.”

M. Clemenceau sent the text of these messages on to me with a note saying: —

“ My personal opinion is that we must honour this signature while making a marginal note relative to revictualling, which we cannot to my mind refuse to discuss ultimately. In truth, the fact remains that the execution of the clause of the Armistice about the fleet cannot at present take place. Tell me your opinion on this point if there are any new arrangements which you can suggest.

No announcement will take place until Marshal Foch announces the signature.

CLEMENCEAU.”

After a night spent in further discussion of the various points and problems involved in the Armistice terms, the German delegates signed. They accompanied their signature with a declaration based on the instruction sent them from Spa, warning the Allies that the carrying out of its conditions would throw the German people into anarchy and famine, whereas it had been anticipated that the terms, while completely ensuring the military situation of the Allies, would have ended the sufferings of non-combatant women and children. The declaration ended with the words: —

“ The German people, which has held its own for 50 months against a world of enemies, will, in spite of any force that may be brought to bear upon it, preserve its freedom and unity.

A people of 70 millions suffers, but does not die! ”

At ten minutes to seven we received a wireless message from Paris which said: —

“ 1. The hostilities will cease upon the whole front from the 11th November, 11 o'clock (French time).

2. The Allied troops will not cross until a further order the line reached on that date and at that hour.

MARSHAL FOCH."

On its heels came a further wireless message addressed by the German delegates to their G.H.Q., stating that they had signed the Armistice, the terms of which had been somewhat modified, particularly by giving six days more for evacuation of the left bank of the Rhine.

Early the same morning I got a message from Clemenceau which said:—

"The Conference of the Plenipotentiaries, after having lasted all night, terminated this morning at five o'clock. Armistice signed five o'clock. Firing will cease to-day on the entire front at 11 a.m. this morning. . . .

I do not know yet the details of the deliberations with the German plenipotentiaries; as soon as I am informed of them I will communicate them to you.

I think that one of the meetings of the Allied Governments for the preliminaries of Peace ought to take place as soon as possible, quite apart, of course, from any consultation with Germany.

CLEMENCEAU."

A second message ran:—

"At four o'clock I shall read to the Chamber the conditions of the Armistice, but the news of its conclusion will be made public officially at 11 o'clock this morning.

CLEMENCEAU."

At 12.30 that day we received a telephone message from Versailles, giving the most important of the last-minute modifications in the terms. It said:—

1. The Armistice has been extended from 30 to 36 days.
2. For a period of five days the Allied Armies are not allowed to move.
3. The delegates will endeavour to carry out the conditions of the Armistice, but the disorder and confusion behind the German lines is so complete that the German Army can neither move forward nor backward. The Allies will endeavour to assist, as far as possible, with supplies of food.
4. The time for the movement back to the Rhine which was laid down as 25 days has been extended to 31 days."



In the House of Commons that afternoon, immediately after prayers, I rose and announced the signing of the Armistice, the terms of which I proceeded to read. I concluded by saying: —

“ Those are the conditions of the Armistice. Thus at 11 o'clock this morning came to an end the cruellest and most terrible war that has ever scourged mankind. I hope we may say that thus, this fateful morning, came to an end all wars.

This is no time for words. Our hearts are too full of gratitude to which no tongue can give adequate expression. I will, therefore, move: ‘ That this House do immediately adjourn, until this time to-morrow, and that we proceed, as a House of Commons, to St. Margaret’s, to give humble and reverent thanks for the deliverance of the world from its great peril.’ ”

Mr. Asquith spoke briefly in agreement with this, noting with satisfaction that the terms read out made it clear, not only that the War was at an end, but that it could not be resumed. My motion was then adopted and Hansard records that: —

“ Whereupon MR. SPEAKER and the Members proceeded to the Church of St. Margaret, Westminster, and, with the House of Lords, attended a Service of Thanksgiving to Almighty God, on the conclusion of the Armistice signed this day.”

The nations turned from the War wounded in body, in economic order, and still more deeply wounded in soul. Some of those wounds have since proved to be gravely septic, and the poison from them yet mars the health of the world.

Of the task which was left to us of making a peace covering ethnic, territorial and economic affairs in every quarter of the globe, I do not propose here to speak. That will require a new series of Memoirs, covering the long controversies of Versailles, which I may record at some future time, if strength and opportunity avail. For the same reason, I have not gone into details of the various discussions which took place, and of the preliminary work that was carried out, while the War was still in progress, to plan for the after-time, and in particular to scheme out the League of Nations which was the only hope of averting yet further and more terrible wars in the years to come. That, too, belongs properly to the History of Peace.

If that peace has seemed, in the years that have passed since November, 1918, a sorry prize for so much blood and sweat, the fault was not with the heroes who fought and suffered through the long years of the War. Maybe it is not possible for us yet to judge aright just what they won. The pattern of human history works itself out

over centuries and millenniums. The full effect of that titanic conflict of rival ideals which was fought out between 1914 and 1918 across all the oceans and continents of the world cannot be gauged adequately by the confused record of less than two following decades.

At least, there were few misgivings among the mass of the population in the victor countries when the familiar sound of maroons, which had hitherto been the signal for the passing of an air raid, now, on the morning of the 11th of November, announced the welcome news that the whole of the terror and ghastliness of a War which had spread over four continents had passed away. It had killed over 10,000,000 of the picked young men of the world in the flower of their strength, and crippled and mutilated many millions more. It had devastated entirely many renowned cities and fair provinces. It had shattered the intricate mechanism of international trade and left a welter of confusion and wreckage which would take a generation to clear and rebuild. It had poisoned the mind of mankind with suspicions, resentments, misunderstandings and fears which are still, and for many a year to come will continue to be, a constant menace to the healthy goodwill and neighbourliness of sentiment which are the only abiding guarantee of peace on earth.

## CHAPTER LXXXVI

### A GREAT EDUCATIONAL REFORM

ONE of the most remarkable and beneficent achievements in the record of a War Cabinet that was concentrating its mind and energy upon the prosecution of a World War, was the bold measure it took to raise the status of the teaching profession, and the carrying through Parliament in the midst of this distracting world tumult of the greatest educational reform which had reached the Statute Book since the Education Act of 1870. The credit for these fine feats of constructive statesmanship belongs to the Minister of Education, Mr. H. A. L. Fisher.

When Mr. Fisher came to the Board of Education, he found that notable advances had been made in the course of the past decade. School Medical Services had been established; Secondary Schools were being developed; and much attention was being paid by the Board to problems of pedagogy. The elementary school had by now certainly discharged one important function; it had practically stamped out illiteracy. But in other respects there were woeful gaps to be filled in our educational system, many deficiencies needing repair, developments crying out to be undertaken, before that system could be regarded as worthy of the nation.

It was notorious that the teachers were shockingly underpaid. Their salaries were so slender as to make it almost impossible for them to enjoy the benefits of travel or to purchase books—two essential means for them to maintain and increase their efficiency—and the meagreness of their pension on retirement or breakdown in health was a scandal. I am a schoolmaster's son and I know from the painful experiences of my childhood how shabbily the profession was treated, and I have also a painful recollection of the privation teachers' families, prematurely stricken down, had to endure. The Board of Education was becoming seriously anxious about the problem of recruitment. In particular, there was a marked falling away in the supply of male candidates for the Training Colleges, and it seemed likely that, if nothing were done, male teachers would eventually disappear from the schools. Educated professional men could not hope to maintain homes, wives and families on such pitances. Scavenging was becoming a better paid and less worrying occupation. My father was paid a salary as a school teacher that a



town scavenger would to-day have regarded as an insult to his trade. The rising cost of living during the War had gravely accentuated this problem. It was also clear that the beggarly scale of remuneration accorded to the teaching profession was a source of serious discontent; and this spirit was likely to spread from the teachers, who are in a position to exert very considerable influence, to the rising generation with which they are permanently in contact.

The system of elementary education was weak at its upper end. For children of sound intelligence who did not pass on to secondary schools, their last year or more at the primary school was often largely wasted in marking time in the seventh standard. Associated with this was the practice, very widespread, particularly in Lancashire and Yorkshire, of granting liberal exemptions from school, either whole-time or half-time, to children between the ages of 12 and 14 who were sent to work in the factories. After 14 there was very little provision anywhere, even on a voluntary basis, for day continuation classes for them; and the supply of secondary schools was inadequate, as was the provision of scholarships and allowances to enable children from poor homes to secure education in them.

On the other hand, the time was now ripe for a big educational advance. The fruits of universal elementary education, maintained over a generation and a half, were evident in a change of the national attitude. Previously it had been common for parents, themselves possessing little or no education, to be impatient and contemptuous of the schooling ordained for their offspring, and eager to get them away and into work. But the new generation of parents had been through the schools, and were widely eager for their children to get a good education. There was a ready welcome waiting for any improvement and extension of the system.

Again, the combing of the country's manhood for recruits had shown up the deplorable physical quality of much of the population. It was clear that we were not taking proper care of the nation's children, and the most obvious and easy way to approach this problem was by means of the schools, where sooner or later they all came under the hand of the State. The schools, developed and extended, could watch over our future citizens from infancy to adolescence, and keep their young lives from becoming warped, debilitated or stunted.

Further, educational reform was obviously one of the most important conditions of the post-War reconstruction for which plans were being laid. Millions of young men would be coming back to civil life, starting on careers, or seeking the university education they had been compelled during the War to forgo, or the technical training requisite for their intended calling. The educational system needed to be expanded in advance, in readiness for this.

Some of the men would be wanted back in the teaching profession, and to get them, it would have to be improved in status. There would be once more an ample labour supply, and the occasion was opportune for raising the school-leaving age and the provision of secondary education. All these reasons combined to strengthen the case for immediate action.

Mr. Fisher was not long in getting to work. On February 2nd, 1917, two months after his appointment as Minister of Education, he presented to the War Cabinet a lengthy memorandum entitled: "Educational Development—Proposals for Immediate Action." This was mainly concerned with the status and pay of teachers, in both the elementary and the secondary schools. Three days later he followed it with a further memorandum entitled: "Educational Reform—General Proposals." In this he set out a 12-point programme of reforms. Summarised, these were:—

1. A reformed system of grants for elementary education;
2. Raising of school age to 14 and abolition of half-time;
3. Provision of Nursery Schools for children under five and down to two years old;
4. Better provision for health of children from five to 18.
5. Compulsory day continuation classes for young people from 14 to 18;
6. Improved secondary education;
7. Increased grants for university education;
8. More free places, scholarships and bursaries to broaden the road from the elementary school to the University;
9. Increased grants for technical training;
10. Pensions for secondary and technical teachers;
11. Development of teachers' training;
12. Improved arrangements for placing youths in industry, commerce and the professions.

The memorandum pointed out that legislation would be necessary for some of these reforms, and invited the opinion of the Cabinet as to whether it would be prepared to take up all or any of such legislation during the War.

Mr. Fisher's two memoranda were considered by the War Cabinet on February 20th, 1917. Pleading especially for the first, Mr. Fisher said that "elementary teachers were miserably paid, and a discontented teaching class was a social danger. Further, as in the case of all fixed incomes, the War had greatly diminished the purchasing power of the teachers' low salaries. Before the War, the wastage of teachers was 9,000 per annum, and this was being repaired only to the extent of 6,000. To meet such a serious shortage after the War it was essential to increase the attractions of the profession now." As to the introduction of continued education, if he could get

statutory recognition of the principle, he was prepared to spend up to 15 years in giving it full effect.

The War Cabinet approved both the memoranda, and authorised Mr. Fisher to proceed with legislation on certain of the matters raised in his 12 points.

He set to work forthwith on his first problem—that of improving the remuneration of teachers, both elementary and secondary. Departmental Committees under the chairmanship of Sir H. L. Stephen were set up to examine this question. It had been suggested that the Board of Education should make itself responsible for the whole cost of salaries and that the teachers should be, in fact, Civil Servants. This suggestion was, however, rejected as fatal to local interests in education, and as tending to make possible undue political influence over the schools. The method chosen was to revise the terms of the partnership between the Board of Education and the Local Authorities in regard to educational grants, so as to secure better salaries for the teachers. A system of percentage grants was introduced, under which the Board made itself responsible for 60 per cent. of the salary expenditure in respect of elementary schools, and for 50 per cent. of the total expenditure. The general effect of this financial change was to double the average remuneration of the teachers, to relieve the Board of all anxieties as to male recruitments, and generally to improve the quality of the applicants for teaching posts.

By itself, the adoption of the revised scale of grants was insufficient to settle the matter of teachers' salaries. It was necessary in addition to secure some agreed measure of uniformity between the salary scales payable by Local Authorities (over 300 in England and Wales) and to provide against the recurrent unrest and dissatisfaction caused by gross inequalities or inadequacy. To this end Mr. Fisher proceeded to set up a Standing Joint Committee, representative of teachers on the one hand and of their employers, the Local Education Authorities, on the other, and charged with the duty of devising agreed scales of salary adjusted to local conditions and the requirements of different types of school. Fortunately, the services of Lord Burnham were secured for the chairmanship of this body. Lord Burnham had the triple qualification of being broad-minded, liberal and a man of business. The "Burnham Scales" became a kind of teachers' Charter, and have been of great value in preserving educational peace and in removing the grave material anxieties which too often used to darken the teacher's life. A teacher who has every reason to be discontented with life is a dangerous, if not also an insufficient, mentor for youth.

The benefits accorded to teachers were further increased by the Teachers' Superannuation Act of 1918, which, roughly speaking, doubled their pension benefits. Hitherto the old age of teachers had



been a time of acute penury, for their pay was not on a scale which allowed a margin for savings, and the pension provided was a miserable pittance. After 40 years' service, a male teacher was entitled at 65 years of age to draw 30s. a week; it was hardly an attractive prospect for the old age of a professional man and his wife. In place of this, the new measure gave him a retirement bonus and pension similar in scale to that accorded in the Civil Service. Thus, a man who, aided by the new Burnham scale, drew during his last five years of service a salary of £400 a year, could retire at 60, after 40 years' work, with an annual pension of £200 and a lump sum in addition of £533.

By these provisions for better salaries and pensions, Mr. Fisher placed the whole teaching profession upon a more honoured footing and made it more attractive to talent. But while this was an essential preliminary to far-reaching reform of education, he passed on to the enactment of the further big programme which he had outlined to the Cabinet in February, 1917.

A measure was prepared for this purpose, and, after careful review, it was presented to the House of Commons and received its first reading on August 10th, 1917. It aimed, as Mr. Fisher explained, at the progressive development and comprehensive organisation of education throughout the country. Nursery schools were to be encouraged for children under five years of age. Provision was to be made for higher elementary education of the elder children in the primary schools, and their exemption under the age of 14 was to be finally stopped. Restrictions were to be placed on the employment of children while of school age. Continuation classes were to be introduced, with the aim of securing eventually a measure of continued education up to the age of 18. Special attention was to be given to physical training and care for children's health, and the powers of medical inspection were to be extended.

After producing his Bill, Mr. Fisher threw himself into a big campaign to secure popular support for its aims and ideals. When the War was reaching its deafening climax, he stumped the country, addressing numerous meetings in every centre, expounding his proposals, and secured for them a large and rapidly consolidating popular approval. The chief opposition was encountered among the more reactionary of the Local Education Authorities, which were afraid that certain of the provisions of the Bill would involve them in dictation from Whitehall, and the Minister decided to evade this threatened hostility by altering the clauses in question. Accordingly, on January 14th, 1918, he withdrew the original Bill and introduced a revised measure. It secured its second reading on March 13th without a division, and thereafter during the spring and summer, while the Germans were delivering their blows on the Somme and the Lys, on the Aisne and in Champagne, and the British legions were reeling

back in defeat and confusion, and the apprehension of utter disaster caused deep anxiety, the House of Commons proceeded to demonstrate its calm confidence in the future by examining and passing clause by clause, this monumental enactment. The Bill received its third reading in the Commons on July 16th, when the Germans were still thrusting towards Paris, two days before Foch's counter-stroke. The Upper House carried its third reading on August 5th, and on August 8th—Germany's "black day"—the measure secured the Royal Assent.

I cannot do more than summarise very briefly here the purpose of this Act. By general agreement, it has revolutionised in many respects the educational system of this country, and has laid a foundation for further developments, not yet completed, in that system. Under its provisions, the State can watch over the welfare of its children through infancy and adolescence, with nursery schools, primary and post-primary schools, secondary schools, continuation classes, from the age of 2 to 18. To illustrate some of the changes it wrought, I may mention that before its passage, some 35,000 children in Yorkshire and Lancashire were working in the mills half-time from the age of 12 onwards. Under the Act, half-time was abolished, and the school age extended for all from 12 to 14, while Local Authorities were empowered to raise the age still further to 15 with the assent of the Board of Education. Further, a good deal of complaint had been made by teachers of the number of children who came to school at nine in the morning, tired out by selling newspapers or milk or other employment. The Act limited the hours of industrial toil for children of a school age to a maximum of one hour before school and one hour afterwards. Provision was made, as I have mentioned, for nursery schools, for Central or Higher Elementary schools, and for practical instruction in the upper standard of elementary schools. Perhaps the feature of the Act which attracted most attention was the provision for compulsory day continuation classes for young people between the ages of 14 and 18. For the first time the principle was laid down that all young citizens should receive some form of education up to their eighteenth year. The economic difficulties of the post-War years have hitherto prevented this section of the Act from being put into effective operation. Its influence has, however, been felt, and a very considerable number of excellent continuation schools are working on a voluntary basis in London and other parts of the country.

The Secondary Schools were fortified by increased grants which made it possible for them to attract a more highly qualified type of teacher, and to develop greater specialisation of teaching in the upper regions of the school. Liberal provision of State scholarships from the Secondary Schools to the Universities has exercised a very considerable influence in raising the general standard of secondary

school education and in widening the sphere of educational opportunity.

In addition to carrying through his great Act, Mr. Fisher, backed by the War Cabinet, took administrative action in various directions to stimulate and strengthen the national system of education. The Universities were not overlooked. They received increased grants. Oxford and Cambridge were accorded Government grants for the first time, an innovation which led to the appointment of a Royal Commission, presided over by Mr. Asquith, which in turn led to several important reforms in these two ancient Universities. Another measure has exercised a widespread influence upon our Universities. This was the allotment of a very liberal provision immediately after the War, for the education of ex-service students in the Universities. No fewer than 27,000 men availed themselves of the facilities thus extended. It would be no exaggeration to say that the vast majority of these ex-service students came from families which had never previously sent or dreamed of sending their sons to the University. This measure had the effect of widely popularising the idea of university training, and giving it in England and Wales something of the general appeal which it has for centuries possessed in Scotland. Among the young men who benefited by these scholarships were some who have since attained considerable eminence. An example which occurs to me is Mr. J. B. Priestley, the famous novelist.

Under Mr. Fisher's predecessors, valuable committees had been set up on the teaching of Classics and Modern Languages. These inquiries were continued, and the reports issued on the teaching of English and of Science now constitute important additions to our educational literature.

The final stages of Mr. Fisher's work of educational reform belong to the immediate post-War years. They may be regarded as having culminated in the great consolidating Statute which he piloted through the Commons in 1921. This measure, which under his direction was prepared by Sir Francis Liddell and Mr. (now Sir) W. R. Barker concentrates in a convenient form more than 30 Statutes relating to public education. Tribute should be paid to the very able body of officials at the Board of Education, including such men as Sir Amherst Selby-Bigge, the Hon. W. N. Bruce and Sir George Newman, whose aid was invaluable to Mr. Fisher in his task of reform.

The Great War was not at an end in itself. We waged it in hope of winning through to peace and a new and better age. Some of the hopes we formed have been disappointed; but of the work which Mr. Fisher did in preparing our educational system for its post-War task, it can be claimed that it was a wise and far-seeing plan to fit the youth of the nation for the tremendous task they would have to face in rebuilding a country whose commerce had been shattered and whose wealth had been scattered by war.



## CHAPTER LXXXVII

### SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE WAR

**THERE** are three questions which are asked about this War. The first is: Could it have been averted? The second is: Could it have been brought to an earlier termination by negotiation? The third is: Could victory have been achieved at an earlier date by better handling on either side of the resources at their disposal and the opportunities opened to them?

My answer to the first question is in the affirmative. My answer to the second would be in the negative and to the third in the affirmative. In the course of my narrative I have indicated these conclusions and also my reasons.

To take the first question. No sovereign or leading statesman in any of the belligerent countries sought or desired war—certainly not a European war. Berchtold, the Austrian Foreign Minister, was anxious for a punitive expedition against Serbia. Had he realised that it would involve his country in war with Russia, Italy and Roumania, supported by Britain, France and ultimately America, he would have modified the terms of the Ultimatum or accepted Serbia's answer, which was abject enough to satisfy even Austrian pride. But he was convinced that Russia would not face war with Germany. The Czar had retreated over the much more important question of the annexation of Bosnia without striking a blow. His army now was not much better prepared than it had been then. On the other hand, Germany had considerably strengthened hers. So the moment the Kaiser gave his word that he would back up Austria's demands, Berchtold had no doubt that Russia would give in and, if Serbia were still obdurate, war with her would be a small matter. What about Germany? I am convinced after a careful perusal of all the documents available on all sides that the Kaiser never had the remotest idea that he was plunging—or being plunged—into a European war. His first bluff of Russia over a Balkan question had been a triumphant success and had added a great deal to his prestige as the War Lord of Europe. He never doubted that he would score another success by the mere threat of war and thus establish still more firmly his diplomatic mastery over the Continent. After giving Austria that assurance of his support he left the bullying of Serbia in her hands. Serbia had dared to assassinate

a future Emperor and deserved to be scourged. But it was too paltry a task for him to attend to the details of the lashings, so he went off on a sea cruise beyond the reach of urgent despatches without taking any thought of what preparations would be necessary to carry Germany through a great war. He was not anticipating a costly war but a cheap diplomatic triumph. When the Serbian reply was received, he thought it satisfactory and that Austria ought to accept it. His Chancellor was opposed to war. His Foreign Minister left Berlin on a honeymoon. The Chief of his Staff, von Moltke, was taking a cure at one of the German watering-places. The German public did not expect war—not even after they found their young men being called to the colours and entraining towards the frontiers. Had it been made clear in time to the Kaiser that Britain would make war upon Germany, if she invaded Belgium, he and his advisers would have paused to confer ere it became too late to withdraw. He had not accumulated sufficient stores of food or raw materials to face the blockade of the British Fleet. A halt of a few weeks to confer would have taken the nations near to the winter months when the march of gigantic armies would have been impeded in the West and impossible in the East. Mobilisation had begun in Austria, Russia, France and Germany, and war had actually been declared between these Powers before Britain delivered her ultimatum about Belgium. It was then too late to recall the legions who were already hurrying to battle.

France shrank from war, and there was nothing further from the mind of Britain or her Government at the end of July, 1914, than the staging of a Continental war. The negotiations were botched by everybody engaged in directing them. It is incredible that so momentous an issue should have been handled in so unbusinesslike and casual a manner. When a collision seemed inevitable engine drivers and signalmen lost their heads and pulled the wrong levers. The stokers alone did their work. In politics one is accustomed to haphazard methods which produce minor disasters that overturn ministries. But this was a question of life and death for Empires, Kingdoms and Republics—and for millions of their subjects. There was no conference between the parties and none was suggested until it was too late. Even then it was not made in a form which could be acceptable to any of the disputants and it was not pressed. Had it been a matter of a railway strike, the two sides would have conferred before proceeding to extremities. War ought to have been, and could have been, averted.

Could peace have been made between the belligerents at any stage of the War before November, 1918? Here again I have re-examined this problem calmly over and over again with a view to ascertaining whether, at any stage of the War before November, 1918, a satisfactory peace with Germany could have been reached, and I am unable to

discover a single opportunity that was missed by the Entente Powers of achieving a settlement that would not have rewarded the principal aggressors for their action in precipitating the conflict.

Up to the very end of the War, Germany was in occupation of Allied territory in the East and the West: Belgium and North-East France in the West; great areas of Russia in the East; Serbia in the South. In spite of questions repeatedly addressed to her by Allied statesmen, Germany never once offered to restore any of these territories without imposing conditions as to security or economic advantage.

Could victory have been achieved by either side before the end of 1918? Both sides committed serious errors of judgment. First of all, could the Germans have won had they made no mistakes? They certainly made two or three cardinal blunders and missed one or two opportunities that opened to them the road to victory.

Their first bad mistake and the one that ultimately proved to be fatal to their hopes was the invasion of Belgium. They weighed the chances of capturing Paris and destroying the French Army against the probability of bringing Britain into the struggle or of finishing off France before British assistance became effective. An inexplicable military blunder, or rather a series of blunders, threw away the opportunity of entering the French capital when it was within their grasp. They might even have destroyed the French Army. The Germans then flung away a chance that never recurred. After that the British Army grew from strength to strength, until, in the words of Sir Douglas Haig, it became "the most formidable Army in the field." Without its intervention Germany would have triumphed. The blunder that ranged the whole resources of the British Empire on the side of the Entente was primarily—but not altogether—a military miscalculation. It was due to a strategic plan in the pigeon-holes of the German War Office. Even the most discerning of soldiers could hardly have anticipated that Britain would have put a splendidly equipped Army of over 2,000,000 in the field and called 5,000,000 to the flag.

The second great mistake of the Germans was the diversion of their strength in 1916 to the futile attack on Verdun. Thereby they missed two opportunities. The first was the final smashing-up of Russia which began so auspiciously for them in 1915. Had they pressed their advantage in 1916, Russia could have been driven to make peace in the summer of 1916 instead of the spring of 1918. The British Army was not fully equipped before the late summer of 1916 to exert enough pressure on the Western Front to compel Germany to release her grip on Russia. By that time the Russian Army might have been irretrievably defeated. Once Russia was eliminated the Germans could have turned all their victorious armies on to France, and the Austrians their whole strength to destroy Italy before America had entered the War and before hunger and privation had weakened the



morale of the Central Powers. Had the Verdun project not been adopted the Germans might have helped the plan of Conrad von Hoetzendorff, the Austrian Commander, for driving Italy out of the War by a joint Austrian and German attack in the spring of 1916. A Caporetto in 1916 might have had that effect, for the Germans were then in a position to press their victory to a decision, as the British Army was not ready for a great offensive in France.

The third fundamental strategical error was the great offensive of 1918. Germany was powerful enough to repel any attack that could be made against her entrenchments by the Allies. She had beaten them off time and again when they had an advantage of two to one in numbers. She could certainly depend on being able to hold her own when there was approximate equality. Instead of which she wasted her reserves on violent attacks which utterly failed to achieve any strategic results. In these assaults she lost most of her picked troops. She neglected to construct second and third lines upon which she could fall back in the event of her armies being driven out of the first. She also took away from the East the divisions which would have enabled her to exploit the Russian resources of men and material which were vital to her life. But the worst German blunder in the War, after the invasion of Belgium, was the quarrel with America. It was at best a reckless miscalculation: at its worst it was an inconceivable folly.

What about the Allies? No one who dispassionately reviews the events of the War can fail to discern opportunities which presented themselves only to be snubbed by the military and political leaders of the Entente Powers.

Their most obvious and most costly blunder was their failure to treat the vast battlefield of the War as a single front. Russia had unlimited resources of superb man-power—in physique, courage and tenacity. They had received sufficient training to constitute a formidable army on the defensive or offensive even against German troops, and they were equal to if not better than the Austrians in that respect. All they lacked was the necessary equipment to make the best use of such fine material. That is the only reason why Russia was beaten. Had France and Britain effected a wise distribution of the financial and mechanical resources at their command—at home and in America—between the armies fighting in the East as well as the West—the German and Austrian attack on Russia would have failed, and failed with such enormous losses as to cripple the Central Powers. Austria, with her large Slavonic population, could have been broken up by 1916. Germany would thereby have been isolated. Austria certainly could not have withstood the onslaught of a well-equipped and numerically superior Russian Army. Least of all could she have done so if the Entente had taken full advantage of the opportunity which the Balkans afforded for organising a combined attack of Serbians,

Roumanians, Greeks and not improbably Bulgarians across the Danube. Here was another great chance missed for bringing the War to a victorious end in 1916.

Was that attainable? A formidable Balkan Confederation on the side of the Entente could have been organised early in 1915 if the Allied Powers had taken it earnestly in hand. The Greeks had offered to join us in 1914. We rejected their proffered help. The Roumanians wished to be assured that if they came in they would be supported by France and Britain. Bulgaria wanted to be squared by promises of additional territory. Serbia possessed an army of first-class fighting men that had already inflicted signal defeat on the Austrians in two pitched battles. These four Balkan States could have put in the field armies of trained men, with war experience, numbering in the aggregate at least 700,000 men. They needed money, equipment, ammunition and improvement in the communications with Salonika and also a quota of about 100,000 Allied troops. Each would in the event of victory expect some territorial concessions. Turkey and Austria between them afforded ample scope for a liberal rearrangement of frontiers, without offending any of the canons of racial integrity and independence. Italy had just joined the Entente. With an Italian Army to face, Austria and Germany could not have spared large forces to attack this Balkan Confederation. With a Russia whose equipment had been improved by Allied contributions, the Central Powers would have had enough to do to maintain their positions on their eastern and south-western frontiers. Some of the greatest Entente Generals favoured the idea. I have already quoted their views. Kitchener himself proposed at an Allied War Council—according to Joffre—that an Allied force of 400,000 should be massed on the Danube “to smash Austria.” Some of the greatest French Generals favoured this plan. As Joffre pointed out, the Salonika line could not, without widening, have maintained such a force. The British Government on my advice decided in February, 1915, to improve the transport arrangements to Serbia with that emergency in view. It was left to Kitchener to take the necessary steps. In the multiplicity of his other duties he overlooked this instruction, and when in October he recalled the project, it was too late to think of sending a large Allied force to the Danube. Had it been sent in the summer, the whole military position would have been fundamentally changed. France and Britain lost nearly 400,000 men in the futile offensives of Champagne and Loos, in September and October, 1915. They were a complete failure and the casualties were very heavy. It stands to the credit of Kitchener’s common sense that he was originally opposed to this combined offensive in France. Germany had foreseen the danger of such a move in the Balkans as I have sketched; for the encirclement of the Central Powers would have been complete. The smashing process was therefore anticipated by them, and the Balkans

with their immense possibilities were lost to the Entente for three years. In another month the only Allied forces in the Balkans were on the wrong side of the mountain range and an Entente Army of 500,000 was immobilised on the sea coast for three years. Had the Allied military leaders in the West surveyed the battlefield as a whole and not concentrated their minds on the earthworks just in front of them, 1915 might have been the turning-point in the War and 1916 would have seen us at the end of this agony of five nations. The writing-off of the Roumanian supplies of oil would have immobilised the Armies of the Central Powers to such an extent that they would have been deprived of their offensive power and their efficiency for defensive purposes would have been appreciably reduced. The testimony given by eminent German Generals before the Reichstag Commission on the causes of the German collapse shows how serious a matter it was to their armies to be deprived of Roumanian oil in 1918. We had taken steps already to cut them off Russian oil at Baku. Germany was beaten partly by the enforcement of oil sanctions against her. Incidentally, one of the advantages of an Allied force in Serbia would have been the complete severance of communications between the Central Powers and Turkey. Without the assistance in guns, ammunition, transport and men which Germany could not have sent to Turkey if the railway to Constantinople had been closed, the Ottoman Armies could not have fought another campaign against the superiority we had mustered in Egypt and Mesopotamia. A Turkish defeat would have relieved the pressure on Russia in the Caucasus and opened sea communications with our Russian and Roumanian Allies.

Lord Allenby sent me the notes of an address he delivered to some officers of the Guards in 1923 on the objects of the Palestine campaign. They have a special interest and relevance when we are considering the effect of a Turkish defeat on the fortunes of the War. Coming from so eminent a soldier these observations carry weight.

#### “EAST OR WEST?”

Was the Palestine Campaign a wise venture? Would it have been better to stand on the defensive in the East; concentrating our strength in the Western theatre?

Consider the situation in June, 1917:—

Russia was out of the War.

Roumania had been overcome.

America had not yet taken a hand.

Enemy submarines were a serious danger.

Money was short.

Our Allies were tired.

There was talk of Peace without victory.



Suppose Germany saying: 'You are weary of war; so are we. We are prepared to surrender Alsace and Lorraine. We will evacuate Belgium. We'll cry quits; without indemnities on either side.'

Such a proposition—though improbable—was not impossible; and it is conceivable that our Allies might have been willing to accept some such terms, forcing us to an inconclusive peace unless we could carry on alone.

In that case, Germany would have been left dominant in Austria, the Balkans, Turkey and Syria; with an open road from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf. She would have won all she fought for; supremacy in Europe and easy access to the East.

With the defeat of Turkey and the defection of Bulgaria, Germany's road to the East was cut; broken beyond repair. The principles of war are eternal; but there are no rigid rules for their application. In undertaking their Eastern adventure, our statesmen showed strategical imagination and political foresight of a high order.

A."

These notes deal with a different aspect of the subject from the one I have been emphasising. Nevertheless, the considerations Lord Allenby urges are of real importance to a country with a vast Eastern Empire.

We also missed a great opportunity in Italy in 1917. The Italians had, like the Russians—but to a lesser degree—a superiority in the numbers of trained men they could put into the field, but in artillery and ammunition they were deficient. The deficiency was specially marked in heavy artillery, so essential to battering a way through fortified mountain passes. As far as France was concerned, the number of available men was approaching the point of exhaustion, but our mechanical supplies were multiplying rapidly. French and British had been fighting incessantly for three campaigns, sustaining terrible losses against the most formidable enemy in the field. The Italians had fought barely two campaigns—against an enemy inferior in every respect to the German Army. The French and British could with advantage have suspended their great offensive for a single year, held the Germans on their front, equipped the Italian Army with heavy artillery and ammunition and also sent them a few divisions of experienced troops to take part in the campaign. An attack on the Italian Front would have relieved the pressure on Russia at an extremely critical juncture and would have had an excellent chance of breaking through the Austrian line. There would have been inevitable losses on all fronts, but the massacres of the Chemin des Dames and of Passchendaele would never have occurred, and Caporetto, which probably put Italy out of effective action for the rest

of the War, would never have been heard of. Foch and Pétain favoured the idea—after the failure of the Chemin des Dames. But there again we were too tardy in our movements and Haig's Flanders obsession thwarted the plan. The French Generals had promised to give him his chance and professional good fellowship was involved in letting him have it.

The last opportunity missed was over the establishment of a real unity of command. A unity which depends upon prolonged argument between two rival and independent Staffs is a sham. Even the unity supposed to have been established over the spring offensive of 1917 was not much better. It was never operated with goodwill. That is why the delay caused by bickerings between two Commanders, not one of whom had the power to give a peremptory order to the other, was responsible for converting an appreciable victory into a disastrous failure. The Germans recognised that the real unity arranged between French and British when Foch was made Commander-in-Chief on the whole front was largely responsible for the failure of their offensive in 1918. Had a General Reserve been set up under central command before the March offensive, the defeats of March and April would never have occurred.

It has been urged by those who still defend the concentration of forces and the continuous offensives on the Western Front that the justification of that policy is to be found in the fact that the Armistice which ended the War was signed on French soil. There are two answers to that claim:—

1. The attacks in the West on entrenched positions which could not be outflanked cost the Allies well over five million casualties.
2. They would not have succeeded in the end had it not been:—

(a) that the blockade had debilitated and weakened the morale of the German Army and undermined the fighting spirit of the German and Austrian peoples;

(b) that the defeat of Bulgaria had opened the southern flank of the Central Powers to hostile attack and deprived them of the corn and oil of Roumania without which they could not have continued the struggle.

Neither Germany nor Austria would have given in during 1918 had it not been for the overthrow of Bulgaria. I have already quoted the authority of Hindenburg, Ludendorff and von Kuhl for that statement.

These are some of the reasons why I have come definitely to the conclusion that victory was within our reach in 1916, or at the latest in 1917, if the strategic direction of the War had shown more imagination, common sense and unity.

Here is my last reflection on this war. If Germany had been led by Bismarck and Moltke instead of by successors who were inferior in statesmanship and war, the event of the great struggle between democracy and a military autocracy would in all human probability have been different. The blunders of Germany saved us from the consequences of our own. But let all who trust Justice to the arbitrament of war bear in mind that the issue may depend not on the righteousness of the quarrel, but on the craft of the litigants. It is the teaching of history, and this War enforces the lesson.



## CHAPTER LXXXVIII

### AN IMPERIAL WAR

THE whole of the British Empire was united in the aims and efforts of the Great War. In a previous chapter of these Memoirs\* I have described how spontaneously India and the self-governing Dominions rallied to the side of Great Britain the moment the War broke out, and how magnificently they responded to every appeal for help in the conflict. And the response of the Crown Colonies and of remote Dependencies was no less prompt and whole-hearted.

The British Commonwealth of Nations is an amazingly heterogeneous conglomeration. The white races of the British Isles and their descendants, who form the nucleus of the Empire, are only a small fraction of its total population—about one-seventh. And of these nearly three-quarters were to be found, at the outbreak of the World War, in the little island home of the breed. The rest were thinly peopling the vast spaces of the self-governing Dominions, or carrying on administration and commercial development in India and the Crown Colonies and Dependencies, among a population mainly coloured and vastly outnumbering them. Every shade of dependence and independence of Great Britain was to be found in the wide variety of the Empire, from the complete democratic self-government of the Dominions to colonial administrations entirely provided by this country. It is hardly surprising that the Germans, with their habit of strict regimentation and uniform order, regarded the Empire as a ramshackle structure which would fall apart at the first shock. But it was not so much a structure as a growth, with the tenacity and inner coherence of a living thing. There were one or two unhappy incidents, such as the short-lived rebellion in South Africa of an irreconcilable section of the Boer population in the early months of the War; but otherwise the Empire not only enjoyed internal peace throughout the War years, but showed a splendid loyalty and eagerness to help the Motherland in her struggle.

The main burden of the Imperial war effort fell, as was natural, upon Great Britain. It was primarily a European war, and Britain held most of the Empire's white population, of its industrial resources, and of its credit strength. Inevitably the great bulk of the fighting troops that took part in the War were drawn from Britain itself. The

\* Chapter LV, The Imperial War Cabinet and Conference.

white citizens of the Empire, however, hurried home from every corner of the globe to join in its defence, and from our great self-governing Dominions organised forces were supplied which proved to be among the very finest fighting troops taking part in the War on either side. In addition to India's great contingent, we drew combatants from the coloured races in our colonies and dependencies of Africa and the West Indies—mainly for service against Germany's African colonies, and in Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia—and we recruited from among them numbers of labour battalions for the work of transport, supply and construction along the Western Front. Their toil alone enabled us to throw up with such speed new defences and fresh roads and railways in lieu of those we were forced to abandon in the great retreat of 1918.

Nor was the Empire's contribution confined to man-power. Gifts of money and supplies poured in to aid the financial side of the struggle. Of the rich donations of Indian Princes I have told elsewhere. But every corner sent its gifts, however humble. The natives of Marakei, a remote spot in the Gilbert Group of the South Sea Islands, could do nothing to help on the War except send coco-nuts. But with them they sent a message declaring that: "They will contribute nuts unceasingly for the War, and cease not till the War is over." That coco-nut spirit of contributing your utmost was characteristic of the whole Empire.

The largest contingents of fighting troops came, of course, from India. Altogether, India sent overseas during the War some 1,302,394 men. The Indian Princes of the Native States supplied 29 squadrons of Imperial Service Cavalry, and 11 battalions of Imperial Service Infantry, for service overseas. In the course of the first few months India dispatched forces to France, East Africa, Mesopotamia and Egypt. By the close of 1914, she was maintaining overseas forces aggregating more than 100,000. As the War developed, so did her contribution. Throughout the Mesopotamian campaign, more than half the troops operating in that theatre were Indians. At their maximum they numbered over 155,000. The numbers of Indians in Egypt and Palestine steadily grew until during the closing months of the War they nearly reached 100,000. They contributed their quota to the Salonika force, and supplied the bulk of the garrison of Aden. All through the War, Indian forces were maintained in France and in British East Africa. Indians fought in Gallipoli and the Cameroons; in Persia and Trans-Caspiana. One small force co-operated with the Japanese in North China against the German naval base of Tsing-Tao. And at home, the Indian Army had to carry on operations on its north-west frontier, where the perennial trouble was increased by agitation stimulated and stirred by German agencies.

It is true that the total forces supplied to the War by India bore only a trivial proportion to her population—less than the half of one

per cent. But most of that population is unwarlike. Their physique unfits them for the nervous and bodily strain of modern war. The chill and dismal humidity of that section of the European battlefield, where the main British forces were massed, proved unsuitable for Indian troops. The fighting races, however, gave us some magnificent troops, who proved their valour and endurance on every front and won a long array of official honours and recognitions, including a number of V.C.'s. The chief contribution of Hindustan was made in southern theatres—Palestine, Mesopotamia and East Africa, where our Indian legions rendered splendid service.

It was obviously impossible for our sparsely populated Dominions to send troops as numerous as could be supplied from the myriads of India. But in proportion to their population, the contingents they mustered were a splendid demonstration of their solidarity with the Motherland. Both Canada and New Zealand passed conscription laws to rally their manhood to the colours. Australia, in no wise behind them in loyalty, valour and pugnacity, somehow failed to carry a repeated referendum for this purpose, as the issue got mixed up with political and personal feuds with which the Commonwealth was rent. Newfoundland also passed a conscription law similar to that of Canada.

The "Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire" shows that the total number of Dominion troops which were sent overseas during the War, or were undergoing training for service on 1st November, 1918, was 984,612—or practically a million men. The highest percentage of the white male population recruited in a Dominion was attained by New Zealand, where the figure was 19.35 per cent. Canada and Australia followed with 13.48 per cent. and 13.43 per cent, respectively. The South African troops which went overseas to the fighting in East Africa, Egypt and the Western Front were 11.12 per cent. of the total white population, but in addition some 50,000 troops served in the German South-West African campaign, of which a considerable proportion were not included in the total of subsequent expeditions.

The highest percentage of all was that of men recruited in Canada who had been born in the United Kingdom. This reached the remarkable figure of 35 per cent., far higher even than that attained by the Home Country. It was of course a selected class, consisting to a large extent of fit and enterprising young men, whose ties with the Motherland were particularly strong. They hurried back in their thousands to stand beside her in her hour of peril.

The same process went on throughout the Crown Colonies. Few of them had a white population large enough to furnish complete formations that could be recruited and sent over intact to join the British forces. But from tea gardens and plantations of rubber and sugar cane, from Rhodesian farms and the islands of the South Seas, sturdy



young Britons came hurrying home to join up. Even those who had settled under foreign flags felt the call of the blood. It is estimated that about 12,000 came from Latin America—some 6,500 of them from the Argentine. Numbers of these were sons or grandsons of former British emigrants, and though born to another citizenship, were proud to claim their British inheritance, even though it was an inheritance of sacrifice. These Latin-Americans of British stock fought well. Among the decorations they won were three V.C.'s and 188 M.C.'s.

The tale of the fight put up by the Dominion troops would fill many volumes. I cannot attempt to set it out here, but I want to place on record the profound gratitude which all of us who shared the burden of responsibility for the successful issue of the War felt to the British Dominions for contributing such magnificent fighting men to our forces. The history of the War would have recorded a different ending if these forces had been lacking on our side. They figured in every important engagement on the Western Front from the summer of 1916, and were the firehardened point of our attack whenever any specially difficult thrust had to be undertaken.

The Canadians, being nearest to Britain, were the first to arrive. Their first expeditionary force reached England in mid-October, 1914. Before the end of December, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry had crossed to France, and in February, 1915, the First Canadian Division left for the battle area. In April it won immortal fame by its stand at the Second Battle of Ypres, where the unknown horror of the first German gas attack threatened a collapse of our line of defence in that critical area.

In September, 1915, the Second Canadian Division joined the First in the line, and the Canadian Corps was formed. A third division came over in January, 1916, and a fourth in September. In that month the Canadians entered the Somme battle, where they played a part of such distinction that thenceforward they were marked out as storm troops, and for the remainder of the War they were brought along to head the assault in one great battle after another. Whenever the Germans found the Canadian Corps coming into the line, they prepared for the worst. On Vimy Ridge one of the most impressive memorials of the War stands to commemorate their spectacular success there in April, 1917. There was no finer display of resistless intrepidity in the whole War. They fought through the worst horrors of Passchendaele in October and November of the same year. At the Battle of Amiens on August 8th, 1918—Ludendorff's "Black Day"—the Canadians headed the British assault which shattered Germany's last hope of military success. And in August and September they led the attack on the Drocourt-Quéant Switch and the strongest nucleus of the Hindenburg line, swept across the Canal du Nord, stormed the Bourslon Wood and took Cambrai. All through

the final advance to victory, Canadian troops were to the fore. They took Valenciennes, and a few hours before the Armistice they marched through the streets of Mons, to the tune of "Tipperary" played on the bagpipes.

The contingents from Australia and New Zealand had further to come, and their first rallying point was in Egypt, which they reached by the end of 1914. After helping to defend the Suez Canal, they sailed off in April, 1915, to write the name of the ANZACS in inerasable glory upon the barren rocks of Gallipoli. By the summer of 1916 they were in France, and in July they were fighting on the Somme. Thereafter, like the Canadians, they were marked out for the grim honour of heading assaults and plunging in wherever the fighting was fiercest. They smashed their way up the Messines Ridge in June, 1917, and in September they were flung into the mud of Passchendaele. In March, 1918, they were brought down to stay the German advance on the Somme, and when in April the Germans thrust in on the Lys Front, the 1st Australian Division was hastily sent north to stop them. Those left on the Somme fought the Germans to a standstill at Villers Bretonneux. In May their own man, Sir John Monash, became their Corps Commander. He was one of the very ablest military leaders thrown up by the War on either side, and it is worth noting that he was not a professional soldier. In the armies of Great Britain a man of his conspicuous genius would have had no chance to show his qualities as a military leader. On July 4th he led his men to a brilliant action at Hamel, where, as I have noted elsewhere, they brought some American troops along with them. The Australians took part in the battle of August 8th, and in the September struggle for the Hindenburg line. Then they were pulled out for a well-earned breathing space, and were on their way back to the front when the Armistice was signed.

To a large extent the story of the Australians is also that of the New Zealanders. They also were at Gallipoli, on the Somme, at Messines, Passchendaele, and the defence of Amiens. In the final advance to victory, from August to November, 1918, they were almost continuously fighting, pressing forward like questing hounds in the front of the battle, performing spectacular feats of daring.

In addition to their achievements on the Western Front, the Dominions contributed strikingly to our successes in Palestine. The Australian Horse, and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, were both invaluable for that desert warfare where mounted units had so large a part to play. The decisive victory of Megiddo, in which Allenby rounded up and wiped out the Turkish forces, was only made possible by the swift, encircling sweep of his cavalry round the rear of the enemy to Nazareth, and thence in headlong dash to Damascus; and in that cavalry operation a notable part was played by the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division. They were tireless

in their pursuit. At one time they rode for 72 hours without stopping to water their horses, which, unbeatable as their riders, held doggedly on. Palestine was a country where cavalry were still an arm of the utmost value, and the Dominion mounted troops contributed a large and indispensable share of the achievements of our forces in that theatre. Their contribution to the rout of the Turkish Army will always be quoted as a conspicuous example of the service which cavalry can render in war when skilfully used.

The South African Brigade was no whit behind the other Dominion forces in gallantry and fighting quality. After the conquest of German South-West Africa, South Africa sent large forces to the campaign in East Africa, where General Smuts conducted operations until Von Lettow-Vorbeck had been driven away from his bases and put on the run in the tropical hinterland of the country. They also sent a brigade north, which after dealing with the Senussi on the Egyptian border in February, 1916, came in May to the Western Front, and fought in Flanders and on the Somme, in 1916; at Arras, Passchendaele and Cambrai, in 1917; and in 1918, took part in the defence against the German attacks on the Somme and the Lys, and in the final advance of the Allies to victory in the summer and autumn.

Newfoundland sent over a regiment, which took part so unyieldingly in the conflict that it used up reinforcements far quicker than they could be sent along to it. It fought at Suvla Bay in 1915, on the Somme in 1916, at Monchy and Cambrai in 1917; and by the end of 1917 its death-roll alone was more than a quarter of all the men sent from Newfoundland. Casualties had wiped out the regiment twice over.

In addition to man-power, our Dominions and Colonies helped the Imperial effort, up to the limit of their resources, with supplies of all kinds. A notable contribution was that made by Canada to the production of munitions. In August, 1914, an appeal was made to Canada to help us with the production of empty shell. The late General Sam Hughes, a man of infectious enthusiasm and energy, promptly formed a Shell Committee to organise the Canadian peacetime industrial capacity for munition production. It made a fine start with this task, but presently the work outgrew the scope of the Committee, and shortly after I established the Ministry of Munitions, I found it would be necessary to secure a revised organisation. By the end of 1915, the Shell Committee had been superseded by the Imperial Munitions Board, under the chairmanship of Sir Joseph Flavelle, and this voluntary body operated directly and efficiently under the Ministry of Munitions right up to the Armistice. The principal output was shells, shell-cases, fuses, explosives and other components of ammunition. Of shells alone, Canada supplied more than 65,000,000 during the War. Other important supplies were



machinery, tools, castings, locomotives, aeroplane supplies, timber, metals, etc. The total value of the Canadian shipments of military supplies exceeded £200 million.

Australia was too remote across submarine-infested seas to render a comparable help in munitions supply for use in Europe. She was able, however, to send much to the Eastern theatres, and special mention should be made of the foodstuffs, fodder and horses she supplied. Her most notable contribution apart from man-power was the Australian Fleet, which not only dealt with the *Emden* and guarded the South Pacific and Indian Ocean against commerce raiders and co-operated in the capture of the German possessions in the South Seas, but also reinforced the British Navy in home waters and the Mediterranean.

I have given an account in an earlier chapter\* of the way in which our Imperial War Councils were strengthened by the presence and advice of the great leaders of the Dominions, and I have there paid my sincere tribute to the high quality of these men—of Botha and W. M. Hughes, Borden, Massey, Ward, Smuts and Bikanir. Their Imperial co-operation was as valuable in counsel as that of their countrymen on the field of battle.

Space fails me to mention all the other ways in which the various parts of the Empire contributed to the joint war effort—the Canadians who served at Archangel and Vladivostock, the fishermen and seamen who rallied to the Navy and to the work of patrolling and mine-sweeping, the hospital units and equipment that were provided. The whole British Commonwealth was united in a single purpose. Its citizens in every latitude did eagerly whatever they could to further the common cause. It is not too much to say that without the 1,400,000 fine men who rallied to the flag from the Dominions and the 1,300,000 who came to our aid from India the Allies would not have been able to bear the strain of this gigantic struggle. May Heaven forbid that we should ever again be faced with so terrible a challenge. But if we are, and the cause at issue is one with an appeal equally clear to the British conscience and loyalty, then we shall find once more that the "bonds of Empire" are no idle phrase.

\* Chapter LV.

## CHAPTER LXXXIX

### LORD HAIG'S DIARIES AND AFTER

AFTER I had written the greater part of this volume there appeared the second batch of extracts from Lord Haig's "Diaries." Rather than interrupt and break up my narrative by intermittent corrections of the story of the War as told by someone else, I thought it preferable to postpone a perusal of the Diaries until after I had written my book. The publication of these intimate reflections—or rather aspersions—by Lord Haig on the men, some now living, some dead, with whom he was associated in the service of the country during the War, must silence the reproof directed against my Memoirs on the absurd ground that they occasionally express adverse opinions on the strategy of Generals who have now passed away. Lord Haig himself never accepted that preposterous canon as to the limitations of criticism. He intended that his censorious records should be published sooner or later. Mr. Duff Cooper has now given extracts from the personal notes of Lord Haig which the latter had destined for ultimate publication. I fully recognise that in condemning anyone who is no longer able to defend himself one must bear in mind the old motto of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*. But the living have also their rights. And if the *mortui*, before departing, deliberately pen indictments for the arraignment of their associates (for both Lord French and I and many others who come in for Haig's condemnation were each of us in his own sphere closely associated with him in the greatest task of his life) after they themselves have passed away, the death of the accuser surely does not deprive the survivors amongst the accused of the liberty to state their case.

Considering that the Diaries contained a daily record of momentous events in which Lord Haig took a leading part and of his impressions and reflections upon them in the quiet of his study at dusk, the extracts are not only meagre but remarkably sterile and undistinguished.\* If this represents the best which Mr. Duff Cooper could find, what must be the quality of the rest?

There are diaries—and diaries. There is the diary kept by those who take a delight in setting down in writing events or sayings which

\* The gaps and omissions from these voluminous Diaries are significant of much careful editing.

have come to their attention during the day without reference to any part they themselves may have played in the transaction which they note. When a fair percentage deduction is made for the unreliability of unchecked gossip, diaries of this kind, if kept by an observant person, have their historical value. But there is another kind of diary kept by persons who have an absorbing interest in their own personality and career and who record each day at eventide their own daily achievements, utterances, meditations and contacts. The Wilson Diaries have exposed the perversion of fact to which entries of this character are liable when the writer constitutes in his nocturnal records the central figure of the whole universe for every day during the long years of his life. It is a sustained egoism which is almost a disease, and its jottings ought therefore to be scrutinised carefully and treated with suspicion as material for a reliable history of the times. In writing my book I had no diary to help my memory. I certainly had no time or inclination amidst the labour and anxiety of the War for sitting down every evening to write for the enlightenment of posterity the tale of my accomplishments during the day. It could not have been of any assistance to me or anyone else in the discharge of our onerous duties. Nor have I written these Memoirs on the strength of recollections blurred by the march of years or touched up by the vanity of repetitive boasts swelling in size and deepening in colour at each repetition. That is a besetting weakness against which we have all to guard. I have therefore not only stimulated but also checked and corrected my memory by reference to the testimony of contemporary documents, reports and conversations officially recorded by impartial observers. There is a mass of information available to all who take the trouble to investigate and peruse it as to what actually took place in those tremendous days: memoranda or letters written at the time, relating the actions as they were then known and the opinions as they were then formed of men who were taking part in the making of the history of those terrible, but great days. Fortunately, I had also access to the most careful official Diary of current events—and of the discussions that led to them—which has ever been penned: Sir Maurice Hankey's Minutes of War Cabinets, Imperial Cabinets and Inter-Allied Conferences. The entries were submitted at the time to the men whose statements were recorded, for their correction. My Memoirs are almost entirely based on this mass of contemporaneous documents. When I draw on my personal memory I invariably check and correct by reference to this written evidence. I have to thank the Prime Minister for the permission he has given me to use these Memoranda and also the War Office for the ready access to their own records which they have accorded to me. Successive Secretaries of State and First Lords of the Admiralty have given me every facility to peruse the information in their respective Departments, and years



before I started penning a single sentence of my Memoirs I gathered together, with the help of my private secretaries during the War, an immense stack of this written testimony. I caused it to be carefully docketed, indexed and examined. I read thousands of these interesting and revealing papers before I committed to writing my Memoirs thus fortified. When the extracts from Haig's Diaries, picked by a skilled dialectician largely in view of the controversies raised and raging as to the late Commander-in-Chief's conduct of the War, appeared in print, I decided not to alter in any particular my settled method of presenting and checking the story of the Great War as it was known to me. When the Duff Cooper Volumes were published, I therefore did not modify or re-cast the draft I had already written except to the extent that I re-examined with great care any statement of facts which seemed to be challenged by Haig's notes. Memory, even when guided by contemporary documents, may lead any witness astray if one essential factor is missing in the chain of his evidence. I owe therefore to Mr. Duff Cooper's editorship the gratitude which is due to any publication which forces one to search out more thoroughly the incidents and influences that went to the making of important decisions and events of which one is endeavouring to give a fair and accurate account.

I want to emphasise once more that my differences with great Generals were not due to any personal or political motives. I had no personal quarrel with either Lord Haig or Sir William Robertson. My relations with Robertson were always pleasant and as for Haig, during my many visits to his Headquarters in France, he received me with the greatest courtesy and always made me feel a welcome guest. Nor were there any political considerations or prejudices that influenced my attitude towards them. I never knew what Haig's politics were and I never inquired. I had no idea what were Robertson's political views. I therefore formed my opinions as to both Haig and Robertson on grounds which had nothing to do with personal or political likes or dislikes. I judged them purely as instruments for achieving victory. As to Sir Henry Wilson, he was an intense and intriguing politician all the days of his life. Every Irishman is an uncompromising politician from his youth upward—and downward. I recall Mr. Tim Healy once saying that in the city of Londonderry every man, woman and child understood the registration laws—the intricate mechanism of party warfare. Henry Wilson was no exception to this concentrated partisanship of his race. But his hatred—for it amounted to that—of the party and the principles in which I was brought up did not prevent my promoting him to the highest position and rank in his profession.

I had no reason to believe that Haig was in the least interested in the conflict of parties, as such. He preferred Asquith's method of dealing with Generals to mine. After Asquith made an appointment

in any Department he was always inclined not to concern himself with what occurred in that Department unless and until Parliamentary trouble was threatened over some of its operations. The less he heard from or of a Department the better he was pleased. He exercised no close supervision over the doings of his Ministers or Generals. His easy-going temperament suited both much better than mine or Mr. Winston Churchill's! No wonder that both Haig and Robertson preferred him and his methods. During the critical days of the War, when it was important not to undermine public confidence in the Commander-in-Chief of our own Army, I made no public attack on his personal fitness for so immense a responsibility, but I never concealed from myself or my colleagues that I thought Sir Douglas Haig was intellectually and temperamentally unequal to the command of an Army of millions fighting battles on fields which were invisible to any Commander.

In substance Mr. Duff Cooper admits that I was justified in my estimate of Haig's mental equipment for such a task. According to him, Haig was as good a soldier as a man can be who did not possess genius—that means he was a second-rate Commander in unparalleled and unforeseen circumstances, where the resources of even a first-rate leader like Foch were only just adequate to pull us through. He had a long training on lines which were irrelevant to the experiences and exigencies of this War. That was not his fault. There never had been such a war, and the narrow and rigid system which he had learnt and taught made it difficult for so unsupple a mind to adapt himself readily to any other ideas. He was above the average of his profession in intelligence and industry—perhaps more in industry than intelligence. He was always a steady and conscientious worker. No one could impute to him indolence or slackness in the discharge of his duty. He possessed an untiring tenacity of purpose. But Mr. Duff Cooper's appreciation of his gifts acknowledges in effect that he was not endowed with any of the elements of imagination and vision which determine the line of demarcation between genius and ordinary capacity. And he certainly had none of that personal magnetism which has enabled great leaders of men to inspire multitudes with courage, faith and a spirit of sacrifice. I was not thinking of the great gods of war like Alexander, Hannibal, Cæsar or Napoleon. It would be unfair to challenge a comparison between them and any of the Generals of the Great War. Haig was not endowed with the magnetic qualities and the discerning eye of a Cromwell, a Marlborough or a Stonewall Jackson. I had once the unforgettable privilege of conversing with a number of Confederate officers and men who had taken part in the American Civil War. They had fought, some under Lee, others under Jackson, Beauregard and Jeb Stuart. The personality that had made the deepest impression on these survivors of a hundred battles was Stonewall Jackson.

asked one of the veterans what was the secret of his hold on his soldiers. "Well," he said, "all I can tell you is that once when we were given what seemed to us an impossible position to storm the men were reluctant to advance in face of fire until an officer went up to them and said to them: 'We must do it—these are the orders of General Jackson.' Upon which they cried out: 'Oh, it is old Jack! Why didn't you tell us that before?' They all leapt up and swept along through bullets and shells." They knew that he never gave them an impossible task. He never ordered an attack until he was convinced by a careful survey of the ground that its capture was attainable by brave and resolute men.

The only Army Commander in France who commanded that kind of confidence in his men was Plumer. Haig never inspired that feeling in his army. His name never sent a thrill through the ranks on the eve of a battle—his presence he never vouchsafed on these occasions. I have spoken to hundreds who fought in his battles from Festubert to Passchendaele and they all testify to that absence of inspiration which flows from the words, presence or personality of a great leader. That is why the appointment of Foch as Generalissimo was hailed with such relief and delight throughout the British Army. Haig undoubtedly lacked those highest qualities which were essential in a great Commander in the greatest war the world has ever seen. He was incapable of planning vast campaigns on the scale demanded in so immense a battle area. The problem set before a Commander of two million men on a hundred-mile battle front was one which needed capacity of a very high order. No British General was ever given so gigantic an undertaking. It was far beyond his mental equipment. Serving under Marlborough, Wellington or Cromwell, he would have been a highly competent leader in a field every acre of which was visible to his own eyes. But when he had to fight battles in quagmires he had never seen and over an area extending to a hundred miles which he never did or could personally inspect, he was lost. He did not possess that eye within an eye which is imagination. He was like the blind King of Bohemia at Crecy. He was entirely dependent on others for information essential to judgment, and those he chose to enlighten and guide him were not only just as devoid of vision as he was himself, but were not his equals in experience, intelligence or conscience. When, in addition to all that, he was called upon in his computations to visualise other battle fronts in far lands or in other continents, some of them hundreds and some thousands of miles away, his mind could not range over such distances, and he felt that to devote any of our resources to assist in these enterprises was like expending explosive energy on flights to the moon, when he needed every kilowatt to drive a few yards at a time over obstacles placed along the bit of earth which was in front of him.



There are two documents which reveal faithfully Haig's limitations for the highest command in a world war. One is his review of the War as a whole which he wrote for the Government at my request in October, 1917. The other is the report he made to the Cabinet in the following October—three weeks before the German surrender—as to the military situation and prospects at that date. Whether Russia or Roumania were in or out of the War, whether Italy or Austria were crushed, whether Bulgaria barred the gates of Constantinople and the Danube, or those gates were forced by the Allies, whether Turkey seized the Suez Canal, threatened our route to India, seized the oil-wells of Baku, or were eliminated out of the War, whether a large reserve of able-bodied men were required to keep 45,000,000 of people alive in the British Isles or even to hold the seas in order to ensure reinforcements and supplies for Haig's own armies, did not come into his reckoning and he sullenly refused even to consider these factors, even when expressly invited to do so. Mr. Duff Cooper dwells upon his hero's "selflessness." Selfish he was not, but he was essentially self-centred. There was no other task but his, no other army than the one he commanded, no other use for the youth of Britain than to make up his losses. No victory was thinkable except in battles he planned. His camera only took in a limited circle of the scene right in front of him, and it was too constricted and faint to take in any other landscape. I was conscious of these defects in him as a leader. Hence my distrust of his capacity to fill so immense a position. Unfortunately the British Army did not bring into prominence any Commander who, taking him all round, was more conspicuously fitted for this post. No doubt Monash would, if the opportunity had been given him, have risen to the height of it. But the greatness of his abilities was not brought to the attention of the Cabinet in any of the Dispatches. Professional soldiers could hardly be expected to advertise the fact that the greatest strategist in the Army was a civilian when the War began, and that they were being surpassed by a man who had not received any of their advantages in training and teaching.

Haig might have minimised the disastrous effect of his intellectual shortcomings had he called to his aid men who were equipped as advisers if not as leaders, with the qualities in which he was himself deficient. Unfortunately, amongst Haig's qualifications, no one has ever attributed to him the capacity for judging men. Considerations of friendship, of social amenity and of easy acquiescence in council largely determined his appointments to positions of vital responsibility. G.H.Q. must be a happy family of men whose relations were not disturbed by the clash of independent intelligences. For that reason his choice of colleagues, associates and subordinates was often lamentable. Let anyone peruse a list of the names of those by whom he was surrounded, and upon whose intelligence and counsel he

depended, and they will recognise the justice of my comment. Had he been a man of supreme ability—which no one claims him to have been—so inadequate a Staff would have impaired his efficiency as a Commander in so colossal an undertaking. His unfortunate selection was partly due to lack of discernment and partly attributable to his inability to hold his own in a conflict of ideas. Haig was devoid of the gift of intelligible and coherent expression. Fluency is not a proof—nor a disproof—of ability, but lucidity of speech is unquestionably one of the surest tests of mental precision. A man of few words is always credited with great sapience, but that must depend on the clarity as well as the content of the words he uses. Lucidity of mind ensures lucidity of expression. Power and light go together and are generated by the same machine. Mere slowness of mind is no evidence of mental deficiency except where quick decisions are essential to effective action. I have known men of sluggish mentality, who, given time, were very sound thinkers. So I have met men of slow speech who were clear expositors. But in my experience a confused talker is never a clear thinker.

Haig had a natural distrust of soldiers who could talk well. Some of the entries in his Diaries make that evident. Soon after his appointment as Commander-in-Chief he paid a visit to the French Army so as to establish good relations with them at the outset of his command. His comments on the personalities of the Generals he met threw a great deal of light on his own character. Of one General he met Haig writes:—

“An exceptionally gentlemanly man and a fine soldier. He certainly has ‘*la flamme*.’”

It is significant that this exceptional man cut no figure in actual warfare.

Of another officer he notes:—

“I am quite impressed with him. So quiet and silent for a Frenchman and such a retiring gentlemanly man.”

It is a tribute to the French understanding of human nature that this silent retiring and gentlemanly man was appointed as their Liaison Officer at Haig's G.H.Q. I have no doubt he did well in that post.

Haig could not hold his own in conference with soldiers or statesmen who could explain their ideas clearly and fluently. He therefore distrusted them and preferred men who had no ideas to set in competition with his own. He liked conventional officers with a soldierly deportment. A soldier who fulfilled the description of “an officer and a gentleman” fulfilled his requirements

But as to Foch, whom he also met in this company of exceptional gentlemen and fine soldiers, all he has to record in his Diary is: —

“As to Foch, he is a ‘*méridional*’ and a great talker.”

It represents his general attitude towards Foch. He always referred to him in any conversation I had with him during the War with amused contempt. The time was coming when he had to recognise that this great talker was “a determined General who would fight,” a man of great courage and decision, and when he had to ask him to take charge of a battle which he, the great silent General, had muddled to the brink of disaster.

One unpleasant trait in Haig's character is brought out by Mr. Duff Cooper in his choice of extracts—quite unconsciously, of course. He attributes to his hero qualities of nobility, generosity, selflessness and loyalty. There are entries in the Diaries which admit conduct utterly irreconcilable with these exalted claims. For instance, the intrigues in which he was engaged with Esher and Robertson to secure the dismissal of his immediate Chief from the High Command and his other and reciprocal intrigue with Robertson and Esher to turn Kitchener out of the War Office and send him to India with a view to installing Robertson as C.I.G.S. “Lord Esher undertook to support Haig's views in London,” and, as his encomiastic editor observes: “He no doubt did so with considerable effect.” Haig profited by the first manœuvre, Robertson by the second. There was an underhandedness about these proceedings which are not consistent with nobility or loyalty. Esher had the mentality and the methods of the intriguer. He loved intrigue for its own sake. He claimed no reward but the satisfaction of putting it through. Haig fell in very readily and aptly with these methods. His justification was that all considerations of personal loyalty must be subordinated to the winning of the War and he would not be deterred from doing his duty by the prospect of personal advancement which it opened out to him. Had he and Robertson informed French and Kitchener of the representations they made to the Prime Minister, their conduct would have been straightforward and justifiable. But it was a subterranean plot to overthrow official chiefs to their own advantage without giving any warning to the victims or any opportunity to confront the accusers and refute the accusation. At the time he wrote his criticisms French was Commander-in-Chief. Lord Kitchener as War Minister was his and Robertson's Ministerial chief. What becomes then of his contention subsequently that to express any disapproval of the strategy of a Commander in the Field—even in secret Council—was reprehensible because it undermined confidence in the military leadership? This “supremely loyal” man was not above ungenerous efforts to pass on to his chiefs, hi



colleagues or his subordinates the blame for his own failures. He failed at Loos. French was entirely responsible and he reported him behind his back to the Government. His first great attack on the Somme was on the whole a sanguinary repulse. He explains in his memoirs that his non-success was entirely attributable to the refusal of his Army and Divisional Commanders to carry out his plans. Gough's Fifth Army was disastrously beaten before Amiens because Haig (1) failed to take the necessary steps to improve the defences; (2) had distributed his troops so badly that the Army he knew was going to be attacked had the least number of troops to defend the front; and also (3) because he had declined to carry out plans to which he had assented for the setting up of a General Reserve designed to support the threatened sector. But when Gough had been beaten owing to conditions for which Haig alone was responsible, Haig, instead of accepting that responsibility as an officer and a gentleman," removed Gough from the command and left the Government to infer that the *dégommé* General was alone to blame. Not much "nobility" there. Take another instance. Haig and Pétain conspired together to destroy the scheme for setting up a General Reserve—vowing to their respective Governments that they had made the most detailed arrangements for coming to each other's aid and that these plans were so perfect that they would work automatically. When the emergency arose and the perfect arrangements failed to automatise, then Haig suggests the failure was due to the fact that Pétain was "almost unbalanced"—that is, to use an expressive if somewhat slang phrase, that his confederate was "in a blue funk." He charges him with wishing to retire on Paris, leaving the British Army in the lurch or to escape northwards the best way it could without French assistance. Not much "loyalty" there.

As to his "generosity," I would like to call attention to an example of it—or rather the lack of it—which affects me personally. Haig has sedulously endeavoured to create the impression, himself and through his friends, that the disasters of March, 1918, were attributable to his having been placed in a position of hopeless numerical inferiority to the enemy owing to my neglect to provide him with the necessary reinforcements. In the text of this volume, I have dealt exhaustively with the charge, supplying official figures to prove how untrue and disgracefully unfair was this device to cast upon others the blame for his own mismanagement of the enormous resources in men and equipment which were placed at his disposal. When Haig took over the Chief Command in December, 1915, the British Expeditionary Force in France had reached a total of 986,189. During the interval between his taking over and the beginning of March, 1918, he engaged that great Army in a number of sanguinary offensives not one of which achieved any decisive result. The

British casualties in France during that period reached the ghastly total of 1,683,887.\* Nevertheless, owing to the efforts made by the Government at home to keep up the strength of his Army, the force at his Command in March, 1918, was 1,886,073. (I am quoting from the official Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War.) When I took office as Prime Minister in December, 1916, its total was:—

Officers	...	...	...	...	58,098
Men	...	...	...	...	1,476,633
Total	...	...	...	...	<u>1,534,731</u>

By March, 1918, there was an increase of 341,000 in spite of the gigantic losses of the 1917 offensives.

When the improvement in equipment is reckoned, the additional strength of the Army under Sir Douglas Haig's command in March, 1918, as compared with December, 1915, is much more striking. When Haig took over in December, 1915, the number of heavy guns in the British Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders numbered 235; in March, 1918, there were 2,062. The increase in the heavier calibres was particularly remarkable. When you come to machine-guns, the opposition of the War Office to the production of this, the deadliest weapon of the War, was overcome by my action. This is recorded in a previous chapter of these Memoirs. In 1914 (August to December) the output was 274. As a result of the urgent measures I took the output in 1915 was 6,064. The efforts I had made to increase production of this redoubtable weapon had only begun fully to fructify shortly before January, 1916. Haig became Commander-in-Chief at the end of 1915. In 1916 the output of machine-guns rose to 33,200; in 1917 it was 79,438; the vast majority of these machines went to Sir Douglas Haig's army in France. He admits in his Diary that one Lewis gun was equal to a considerable number of infantrymen.

As to gun ammunition, the average weekly expenditure of shells during April, 1916, when the new supplies were beginning to come in, was 80,673 shrapnel and 77,590 high explosive. In April, 1918, it was 786,378 shrapnel and 1,197,771 high explosive. When a comparison is made in the calibre of the shell the contrast is much more pronounced. This enormous increase is attributable to the factories I built and the works I commandeered for the production of ammunition. I also took a conspicuous part in all the efforts made to raise men for the Army. Sir William Robertson has admitted in a letter, which I have published previously, that the carrying of Conscription

\* 1st January, 1916, to 28th February, 1918.

was largely attributable to the fight I put up. But when you come to the production of munitions, guns, machine-guns and trench mortars, I have no hesitation in claiming that far and away the most leading part in determining the scale of production was due to my organisation of the engineering resources of the nation for this purpose.

It is rather remarkable that amongst all the meticulous entries covering sometimes events of great historical interest, sometimes incidents of the most trivial character (as I happen to know), in Haig's intimate story of his actions and reflections during the War, there should have been no word of recognition in these voluminous Diaries of the fact that the thousands of great guns, the scores of thousands of machine-guns, and the scores of millions of shells, which enabled him to fight his great battles, were attributable to the organisation created by a person to whom he makes constant reference of a derogatory character. Had there been one such entry, I feel certain Mr. Duff Cooper would not have deliberately suppressed it, as he has given so much prominence to all the adverse personal criticisms which Haig recorded in his Diary. He is quite incapable of such a disreputable interpretation of his duty as an editor of historical material. On the other hand, it is equally difficult to believe that a man to whom Mr. Duff Cooper attributes such a nobility and generosity of character as Haig should have refused to make the slightest acknowledgment in his hours of triumph of the help which had been given in the attainment of victory by a leading Minister of the Crown, especially a Minister of whose defects he feels it a duty to make reiterated notes in his Diary. What makes it all the more surprising that there should be no mention of the service I rendered him in the prosecution of his campaigns, is the fact that I have proof in Sir Douglas Haig's own handwriting that he was fully alive to the obligation he was under to me for hustling the guns and ammunition with which his army was equipped. Here is a private letter written by Sir Douglas Haig to me on September 23rd, 1916 (in the middle of the Somme battle), in which he says:—

“The whole Army appreciates to the full the stupendous task that has been accomplished under your able guidance in providing the enormous quantities of munitions of all sorts without which our present successes would be impossible. . . .”

Contrast this with Mr. Duff Cooper's extraordinary failure to find a single entry in any of these Diaries recording Haig's gratitude for the overwhelming help brought to him. His practised eye has detected every word of derogation, and his only too willing pen has given them publicity—but he failed to discover a syllable of the



thanks which Haig in his letter acknowledged to have been merited. Sir Douglas Haig must have had painful memories of the time when neither he nor his predecessor had any heavy guns to attack German trenches, and when such light guns as there were had to be limited to an expenditure of a few shells a day, even to retaliate upon the Germans for their destructive bombardment of British trenches. Haig in his Diary attributed the bloody failure of his attack at Artois to the fact that the artillery bombardment was not effective enough to smash the German trenches or to destroy the barbed wire entanglements in front of them. He also records the order received in May, 1915, that he must be "careful of ammunition" as an attack is threatened by the Germans at Ypres. It was then I took over the duty of organising the supply of Munitions. Before he attacked on the Somme his Army had been equipped with hundreds of the best heavy cannon in the battlefield and the supply of ammunition had risen to 1,000,000 shells a week. The factories I erected or commandeered turned out an enormous number of guns, machine-guns, tanks, trench mortars and ammunition week by week to the end of the War. Is it credible that there is not one word of acknowledgment of this service in the whole of these Diaries?

Mr. Duff Cooper begins his chapter on the Battle of the Somme with these words, quoted, I presume, from the Diaries:—

"For seven long days the bombardment had continued. From British guns alone 1,000,000 shells had been hurled into the German lines."

He has other quotations from Haig on the saving effected in infantry by the supply of machine-guns. But not a word of grateful recognition that the provision of these guns and ammunition had been the result of months of incessant toil in the setting up of an organisation for utilising the great engineering resources of Britain to equip the British Armies in France with the necessary means to fight their battles on equal terms with their well-equipped foes! Not a word as to the struggle with the War Office for the authorisation of this unprecedented output of heavy guns and machine-guns. The terrific bombardment which expended tens of millions of shells at Passchendaele was also made possible through the exertions of the organisation which had been set up. But his unfairness and ingratitude is not confined to material. Not only were his colossal casualties made up through the untiring efforts of the Government of which I was the Head—made up in spite of considerable internal difficulties—but the actual numbers of the forces under his command had been increased by hundreds of thousands since I became Prime Minister. And yet his only comment as to the fine Army with which he was provided to enable him to face the German

slaught on his lines is a surly grouse that the Government at home had let him down. Not much in this of the magnanimity of which we read so much. More mean than magnanimous.

I turn now to Haig's claim that he was the prime mover in the decision that led to unity of command on the Western Front. When the idea of a united commandment became a recognised success, there were many competitors for the honour of having originated it. When it was unpopular in the Press, suspected in Parliament and frowned upon in the highest circles of the professional army, I found no rivalry for the glory of championing the proposal. When I made my first attempt at securing a United Command in the spring of 1917, the Cabinet acquiesced in it, but had I insisted on pressing it to the point of a rupture with Haig and Robertson, there would have been serious political trouble. The letter from Lord Derby quoted by Mr. Duff Cooper shows something of the internal difficulties with which I had to contend in establishing what is now accepted by everybody, and claimed by many, including Haig, as their own idea. That was the reason why I could not hustle Haig long too peremptorily and why in consequence, fatal delays ensued. In substance, effective unity would have been achieved by the Versailles plan for the establishment of a general reserve under the command of Foch. The two Commanders-in-Chief would have had to conform their strategy and their tactics to those of the General who controlled the reserves. Haig understood this quite well. His view on the effect of the resolution that set up the General Reserve is made clear by the entry he made in his Diary on the day it was carried at Versailles: "To some extent it makes Foch a Generalissimo." Pétain formed the same opinion as to its effect. And so did Clemenceau. Neither of these eminent men desired to elevate Foch to such an exalted position. Hence the intrigue which destroyed the plan for setting up a General Reserve. Hence also the disaster of the 21st of March. Foch predicted that in the absence of a united reserve, defeat was inevitable. When it came both Haig and Pétain were frightened by the consequences of their sabotage,\* and were prepared to hand over the supreme responsibility for saving the situation they had created to anyone who was prepared to accept it, so long as he was acceptable to the politicians. Haig's entry in his Diary on 25th March, after he had visited the battle-front (on the fourth day of the battle) and seen the state of things, gives some idea of his frame of mind.

"Monday, 25th March, 1918. . . . I got back from Dury with General Lawrence and Heseltine about 3 a.m.

Lawrence at once left me to telegraph to Wilson requesting him

\* Haig says in his Note on the third day of the battle: "Pétain struck me as very much upset, almost unbalanced and most anxious." (Duff Cooper: "Haig," vol. II, p. 252.)

and Lord Milner to come to France at once in order to arrange that General Foch or some other determined general, who would fight, should be given supreme control of the operations in France. I knew Foch's strategical ideas were in conformity with the orders given me by Lord Kitchener when I became Commander-in-Chief, and that he was a man of great courage and decision as shown during the fighting at Ypres in October and November, 1914."

### Foch to the rescue!

Nothing but a paralytic fright could have effected so complete a conversion in a few days to the supreme need for a Foch control of the battlefield. When one recalls the equanimity with which Haig contemplated the reports that came in about the vast preparations in men, artillery, aeroplanes and ammunition made by the Germans for attacking the ill-prepared British lines, and the contemptuous way in which he brushed aside the plan for mobilising a formidable reserve under Foch to support those lines when the attack came, this *bouleversement* is miraculous.

He was now only too ready to leave the clearing-up of the mess he and Pétain had conspired to produce at once to "General Foch or some other determined general who would fight." Foch was "a man of great courage and decision." When did he come to that conclusion? The only opinion he ever expressed of Foch in his Diaries up to that date (so far as we are permitted to know) is that he was "a great talker," whilst another undistinguished Frenchman whom he met about the same time is commended as "a fine soldier." Haig habitually referred to Foch in these terms of superior contempt with which the inarticulate generally allude to the expressive. His story is that he suggested Milner and Henry Wilson should come over to France to arrange for Foch to take over "supreme control of the operations in France." As for the claims made by the friends of Milner and Haig respectively for the credit of proposing that Foch should co-ordinate the efforts of the French and British Armies it is not for me to express an opinion. Whether Foch's appointment at Doullens as co-ordinator (but not as Commander) was due to Haig's panic or to Milner's persuasion will no doubt one day be settled by impartial historians. Personally, I think both these elements contributed to the result. Poincaré, Clemenceau and Pétain are also amongst the claimants to share in the Doullens advance toward unity, and rightly so, for they also participated in the scare for which at least two of them were largely responsible. They were all present at the conference and did their part in promoting agreement. In a previous volume, I have told the full story of the subsequent appointment at Beauvais of Foch to be *Général-en-Chef* as it is revealed by contemporary documents.



The facts speak for themselves. Competitive claims for the origination of an idea are generally unprofitable and unpleasant. But I am bound in the interest of truthful narrative to correct one mis-statement which Mr. Duff Cooper makes in dealing with the Doullens episode. He asserts that whereas once upon a time I had been a strong advocate for the appointment of an Allied Generalissimo, I abandoned it at Versailles, but that Milner took it up at Doullens. He has compressed three mis-statements into one short paragraph—an exceptional feat for the most reckless partisan: (1) that I proposed a Generalissimo for the Allied Armies; (2) that I dropped the proposal at Versailles; (3) that nevertheless it was established finally at Doullens by Milner. I never proposed an Allied Generalissimo. I knew that was practically unattainable. Neither Russia, Italy nor Belgium would consider any proposal for placing their armies under a foreign Commander-in-Chief. My proposal was confined to unity of commandment on the Western Front. That was achieved temporarily by Briand and myself in the spring of 1917. I went as far as I could hope to succeed in restoring that unity when I proposed at Versailles to create a reserve in the West and place it under Foch. Milner was with me at that conference and, although he was a whole-hearted advocate of Unity of Command, he agreed that we could not then carry things any further. It turned out that even thus we went beyond the possibilities of the situation. Suspicions and susceptibilities defeated our purpose. It was only the out of March that enabled us to make any progress. That converted the wreckers of a united reserve under Foch's direction—Haig, Pétain and Clemenceau—to the essential need for unity, and at Doullens they all supplicated the rejected Foch to come to their rescue in co-ordinating this chaos. But Doullens did not make Foch Generalissimo. When subsequently Foch was made *Général-en-Chef* of the French and British Armies at Beauvais, the Italian Prime Minister refused to accept that arrangement for the Italian Army. He would only agree to the Doullens arrangement which empowered Foch to "co-ordinate" Allied effort with the assent of the Commanders of the three Armies, but with no authority to command. Mr. Duff Cooper's partisanship forces me to quote the testimony of the highest authority on the evolution of Allied Unity—Foch himself. Bugnet, in his record of conversations with Foch, asserts that the latter informed him that:—

"It is Lloyd George who contributed the most toward the attainment of the unified command. As early as the Rapallo Conference, when the Versailles Committee was set up—even earlier, as far back as 17th October, 1914. He saw everything clearly. He even invented me!"\*

\* Bugnet: "Foch Talks," p. 218.

I may also quote from a letter written to me by Foch himself, not during, but after the War. It was his official reply to the thanks expressed to him by the two Houses of Parliament for his great part in achieving victory:—

“ 23.8.19.

Dear Prime Minister,

. . . I do not forget that if I was summoned to be Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies, it was on your initiative and thanks to your confidence. If I was also able to direct the War to a speedy victory it was thanks to the persistent readiness of the English Government to reinforce and maintain its armies in France, in 1918, at sufficient strength, and likewise to give powerful help in the transport of the American divisions to Europe.

In the face of such confidence and of such serious efforts I have on my part exerted every effort of which I was capable to obtain victory, making the best use of the means which had been fully assured to me. . . .

F. FOCH.”

I never ceased to work for unity of commandment in the West but I would not have thought it necessary to revert to the persistence with which I laboured for and ultimately achieved it had it not been for Mr. Duff Cooper's overstrained anxiety to minimise my efforts. I do not wish to detract one jot or tittle from the great services rendered by Haig, Milner or Clemenceau at Doullens in securing a measure of co-ordination between the British and French Armies. Nor do I seek to deny Haig's own statement that Milner's action was attributable to the conclusion he (Haig) had come to that Foch should be asked to pull the British Army out of the confusion in which it had landed. Haig says that the proposal was his and that Milner agreed. I have no desire to challenge this statement. As to Haig's explanations of the March disaster and its causes, they are inaccurate, incomplete and misleading. One could not have expected him even in the privacy of a Diary—especially a Diary intended for subsequent publication—to admit his own responsibility for the defeat. And it is only human that he should search out apologies which cover up his own mistakes. But he has gone beyond, outside and often right across the facts. Let me give a few examples of the more important misstatements culled from Duff Cooper's extracts:—

1. “All possible preparations to meet it (the German attack) had been made.”

This is simply not true.

- (a) The defences were insufficient and in parts purely sketchy

Commandement en Chef  
des Armées Alliées

G.Q.G.A. le 23.8.19

Le Maréchal

Monsieur le Premier Ministre,

... Je n'oublie pas d'ailleurs, que si j'ai été appelé au Commandement en Chef des Armées Alliées, c'est sur votre initiative et grâce à votre confiance. Si j'ai pu également mener la guerre à une victoire rapide, c'est grâce à la volonté soutenue du Gouvernement Anglais, de renforcer et de maintenir, en 1918, à des effectifs suffisants ses armées de France, comme aussi d'aider puissamment au transport des divisions Américaines en Europe.

En présence d'une pareille confiance et de si sérieux efforts j'ai déployé de mon côté, toute l'activité dont j'étais capable, pour arriver à la victoire, en utilisant au mieux les moyens qui m'étaient parfaitement assurés. ...

*F. Foch*

Extracts from M. Foch's letter to Mr. Lloyd George of  
23rd August, 1919.



When the attack came trenches and machine-gun positions which were essential to effective defence existed only on paper. Both Gough and the "Official History of the War" bear out this description of the disgraceful insufficiency of the defences.

(b) The troops were so distributed that infantry and artillery strongly held the unmenaced part of the front and the threatened sector was thinly lined and supported. Most of the available resources were in the North, and the Fifth Army, against whom a great offensive was apprehended for weeks, was left with feeble support. Haig, according to Mr. Duff Cooper, states in his Diary that on the fourth day of the battle he decided to thin his line in the North to concentrate reserves on Amiens. Why did he delay that obvious operation until our army was surrounded? When he admits that he knew weeks before the 21st of March that a gigantic German attack was coming on his Southern Armies, why did he not then thin his line in the North? His Northern Armies had twice as many men to the kilometre of trench they had to hold as Gough had, and many more than Byng had. There are no relevant extracts from the Diary to explain the reason why Haig made so fatal a distribution of his divisions. When one recalls the fact that Haig had come to the conclusion that Lord French was unfit for his post as Commander-in-Chief because at the Battle of Loos he had kept his reserves too far behind the line, it is inexplicable that Haig himself should have repeated that blunder on a far larger scale and with much more disastrous results. Lord Haig passed judgment on his own subsequent conduct when in 1915 he entered in his Diary this censure of French's handling of reserves. "When the C.-in-C. remains blind to lessons of war in this important matter, we hardly deserve to win."

(c) Haig threw over a plan which would have placed around Amiens a large reserve—mostly French—which could have been thrown into the battle without loss of time. He admits in his Diary that *on the third day of the battle* he "requested Pétain to contribute a large French force of 20 divisions about Amiens." Pétain was called upon by the Versailles plan to contribute 13 to the General Reserve. Had that plan not been thwarted by Haig and Pétain there would have been 30 divisions in reserve, and as it became increasingly clear from reports received as to enemy preparations behind the line that the attack was coming somewhere in the area of Amiens, Foch could have moved a sufficient number of these reserved divisions to that area so that they should be available for supporting the hard-pressed British when the attack materialised. It would not only have enabled them to defend their battle zone but to counter-attack. When Haig's request for 20 divisions was addressed to Pétain, the battle had been proceeding for three days and most of the battle zone was already in German hands. Moreover, Pétain's reserves were scattered about between Noyon and the Swiss frontier.

In face of these established facts, it is difficult to justify the statement that "all possible preparations to meet the German attack had been made." In reality, it is an amazing statement and is another demonstration of Haig's unrivalled facility for covering up failure with complacent beliefs. It carried him through the carnage of Passchendaele with the growing conviction that a succession of ghastly checks which were wearing out his fine army constituted a galaxy of brilliant victories which were battering the German Army into unmendable fragments.

There is one unconscious exposure in the Diaries of the casual methods of the High Command of a great army in a modern battle. For two whole days after the March battle began the British forces had been fighting the largest and best equipped army that had ever marched into battle. Our troops were outnumbered by two or three to one. They were being beaten back along the whole front. The enemy had over an area of many miles broken right through all our defences and we were being driven back in utter disorder. During these critical days when disaster had fallen on his army, neither Sir Douglas Haig nor his Chief of the Staff had visited the scene of action to confer with the Army Commanders. On the third day of the battle Haig left his chateau to see what had happened and, when he got there, to use his own words, "was surprised to find Gough's Army was behind the Somme!" That is all he knew about what was going on. He promptly requested Pétain to send him 20 French divisions. When Pétain refused these, Haig on the *fourth* day of the battle decided, according to his own Diaries, to bring down his own reserves from the North! How leisurely it all looks in cold print! Gough's Army had at that date been driven out of its original front a distance at some points of 16 miles. The defences were everywhere broken through. At Passchendaele it took Haig four months of hard fighting to press back the German Army a distance of three miles—or four at the apex of the attack. When our tanks broke through at Cambrai, Ludendorff lost no time in bringing up reinforcements from other parts of the front, and by his promptitude he converted defeat into victory. At that time the Allies along the whole front outnumbered the forces at Ludendorff's disposal by nearly 50 per cent.

There are one or two other mis-statements made by Haig which I attribute to slovenliness of memory rather than to any deliberate intention to mislead. He states that if he had not refused to "send further troops to Italy or to form a General Reserve the very narrow margin which finally divided the Allies from complete disaster might have been obliterated." So far from desiring him to send more troops to Italy we actually recalled two British divisions from Italy some time before the great battle was fought. We also had the consent of the Italian Government some weeks before the battle to the sending of several Italian divisions to France. But neither Haig nor

Pétain expressed any pleasure at the promise or took any steps to take advantage of it. I cannot see what point Haig wishes to make when he refers in this conjunction to the General Reserve. Surely the presence of a powerful reserve near Amiens would have averted defeat. How could it possibly have accelerated or aggravated disaster? He would have been obliged to contribute to the Reserve by thinning his over-insured positions in the North. That he was ultimately forced to do.

The other mis-statement is that in which he complains that the Government had not congratulated him on his notable victory in August, 1918. Sir Henry Wilson seems to have suggested to him that the Cabinet were fretful about the casualties incurred in the winning of these triumphs. Haig replied that they might at least have congratulated him. I have perused very carefully all the minutes of the War Cabinet at that date and I find that so far from protesting against the heaviness of the losses in these important battles, we expressed pleasure that they were so light in comparison with the results achieved, and they certainly were light when compared with the slaughter incurred in previous offensives. In the second place, I also discovered that, after these battles, on my initiative a resolution was adopted by the British Imperial Cabinet (which included all the members of the British War Cabinet) congratulating him on his successes. The following day Haig's acknowledgment is recorded in the Minutes. As to the casualty warning, Sir Henry Wilson acted entirely on his own initiative on this occasion. In the Somme and Passchendaele battles I repeatedly protested against the heavy losses incurred for trivial or doubtful gains. But the victories of August, 1918, which helped to break up the resistance of the enemy and contributed materially to the final victory were won at a comparatively slight cost of life. I cannot account for Sir Henry Wilson's letter to Haig. There was a streak of mischief—not to say malice—in his nature which often made trouble and sought to make trouble. On the other hand he was very anxious at this date to ingratiate himself with the Commander-in-Chief, who distrusted him through and through. Wilson was conscious of this distrust and perhaps he thought this confidential communication might be regarded by Haig as a friendly act and would make him feel that he could rely on Wilson for useful inside information. You never can track down the motive in so labyrinthine a character as that of Sir Henry Wilson. When men attain elevated positions they attract the buzzing activity of tale-bearers who are anxious to prove their own loyalty in contrast with the hostility or treachery of others. It requires great strength and breadth of mind to prevent this kind of tittle-tattle from engendering suspicion and ill-will between men whose co-operation is essential to the success of an enterprise. I have seen irreparable harm done in politics as well as in war by the readiness of men to credit



poisonous gossip. Haig was too apt to listen to these pernicious sycophants. French had fallen by the daggers of his own colleagues just as great opportunity was opening out to him. The Prime Minister of the day was beguiled into delivering the final blow. Haig had that manœuvre constantly in his mind. Two French Commanders-in-Chief had been removed. He felt his own position none too secure. This made him all the more suspicious. Wilson was very desirous of assuring the Commander-in-Chief that so far from playing the part of Robertson in the supplanting of French and Kitchener he could be relied upon to safeguard Haig's interests on the home front.

But there is still one revelation in his story which I cannot pass over without comment. I do so with genuine regret, but the prominence given by Mr. Duff Cooper to Lord Derby's secret activities forces me to do so. Had he not thought fit to give publicity to these clandestine conversations I should not have alluded to them. Until these extracts from the Haig Diaries were published I never, as a fact, understood the extent to which Lord Derby as War Minister had encouraged Haig's and Robertson's resistance to the Cabinet policy of unity of command, and also to its efforts to avert or abate the tragic carnage of the Passchendaele campaign. Had Lord Derby exerted his conspicuous diplomatic gifts to promote these legitimate aims of the War Cabinet, the wasteful delays which occurred in achieving unity would have been avoided, Passchendaele might never have been fought, and the battle of the 21st March might have ended in a smashing triumph and not a defeat. But when so influential a personage as Lord Derby, holding such a key position as that of Secretary of State for War, by letter and talk expressed sympathy with Haig's and Robertson's stubborn opposition to the Cabinet's policy, they naturally thought they could rely upon him to help them to thwart it and at any rate to prevent any serious mishap occurring to themselves if they committed their fortunes to a thwarting intrigue.

## CHAPTER XC

### SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENTS AND SOLDIERS RESPECTIVELY IN A WAR

EVERY prolonged war has at one stage or another produced differences and disputes between the civilian Government and the Generals in the field. The only exceptions are those where autocrats themselves commanded their own armies. Where success carries disappointment ensues and disappointments lead to disagreements. It is also inevitable that there should be argument as to reinforcements and supplies between those who have to use them and those who have to furnish them. No country has unlimited resources at its command, and a wise Government faced with a formidable enemy will mobilise its strength to the best advantage. In this respect Governments cannot delegate their primary responsibility. But whilst Governments and Generals ought to realise each other's difficulties they are naturally each more imminently conscious of their own. One point of view is more constantly present to the Government—the General, on the other hand, has the other point of view always in front of him. Where Governments have several armies in the field, each under a separate command, they are confronted with the additional problem of distributing their resources between these various units. If the fight is on sea as well as on land, Governments must decide what proportion of the strength of the nation they ought to devote to each respectively. Governments have the entire responsibility for the home front. That front is always underrated by Generals in the field. And yet that is where the Great War was won and lost. The Russian, Bulgarian, Austrian and German home fronts fell to pieces before their armies collapsed. The averting of that great and irrevocable catastrophe is the concern of the Government. Great care must be taken of the condition and susceptibilities of the population at home, who make it possible to maintain, to reinforce and to equip armies. All the suffering is not in the trenches. The most poignant suffering is not on the battlefield, but in the bereft hearths and hearts in the homeland. If in addition to the anguish of grief women have to witness the pinched faces and waning strength of their children there will soon be trouble in the nation behind the line, and if men home on leave have to carry

back these unnerving memories to the trenches their will to fight on is enfeebled. That is what accounted for the sudden breakdown in the German resistance in November, 1918. The ration allowance for each British household was cut down to the lowest minimum compatible with health. Anything lower would have made trouble. But there was no privation. In Germany and Austria children died of hunger. The ration of the British soldier was maintained at its excellent maximum to the end. The food allowance of the German soldier was cut down to an unappetising and insufficient minimum. But the adequate feeding and clothing of a population of over 45,000,000 in Britain and of 3 to 4 millions abroad takes some doing. That was the care of the Government. Generals thought we were spending on this problem a good deal of energy and man-power which ought to have been devoted to strengthening their armies. Millions of the picked young men of the nation were placed at their disposal. More than half these millions were either killed or wounded, too often in the prosecution of doubtful plans or mishandled enterprises. Generals demanded more millions not only to fill up gaps thus caused but to increase further the numbers under their direction. The Government had other responsibilities to discharge which also required the services of able-bodied men. It was for the Government to determine apportionments. Out of this discussion came suspicions and resentments which poisoned goodwill and whole-hearted co-operation.

Ought we to have interfered in the realm of strategy? This is one of the most perplexing anxieties of the Government of a nation at war. Civilians have had no instruction, training or experience in the principles of war, and to that extent are complete amateurs in the methods of waging war. It is idle, however, to pretend that intelligent men whose minds are concentrated for years on one task learn nothing about it by daily contact with its difficulties and the way to overcome them. I shall deal later with the extent to which Generals were taught before the War any lessons useful or pertinent to the conduct of modern warfare. But strategy is not entirely a military problem. There is in it a considerable element of high politics. The passing of the gates of India, the Far East and Australia into enemy hands is not by any means principally a military question for Great Britain. The defeat of the Turks on the Suez Canal, and of the Turko-German Army in Palestine was an Imperial necessity. The opening of a road to Russia through the Balkans was also a question of high policy, the neglect of which nearly lost us the War, and might well have done so had America not come in on our side, in time to avert the results of the selfish narrowness of the Western Allies. Had Russia and Roumania been equipped by France and Britain, their Armies would not have been beaten and the Russian Revolution would not have occurred before the end of the War. The feeling, especially in Russia,



that her Western Allies had abandoned her gallant soldiers to hopeless slaughter by the great guns and the overwhelming shells of Germany when they were in a position to provide the equipment for an effective resistance, largely contributed, not only to the despair of the Russian Army, but to turning its anger against the Allies. The knowledge of the prodigious waste of ammunition on the Western Front in the prosecution of futile and ill conceived campaigns, whilst the Russians were left without any shells to defend themselves, looked to them like a wanton and profligate betrayal which excited fierce indignation in the Russian ranks. Militarily it was foolish—psychologically it was insane. It was the duty of the British and French Governments to avoid this disaster. Unfortunately they left the decision to Generals whose fortunes depended on the victories of their own armies.

Questions of policy were also essential to a wise handling of the question of man-power. It was for the military to estimate the numbers they needed, but there were other Departments making similar demands and it was for the Government to weigh the relative importance of those demands and to decide how many they could and should allocate to each. It is just like the claims each Government Department presents to the Treasury for the coming financial year. The aggregate always exceeds what the finances of the nation can afford. The Government decide what to allow, what to reject, or how much to cut down in claims which are in themselves justifiable. This is a domain of strategy in which the Government must be supreme. An extra 200,000 men at the front would not have converted the Passchendaele fiasco into a triumph, but it might have lost the War by disorganising the services that kept the nation from the hunger and penury that destroyed Germany and Austria.

The psychological blunders perpetrated by Germany afford many illustrations of the shortsightedness of subordinating considerations of statesmanship to immediate military exigencies. Strategy must take cognisance of both. There is the occupation of Belgium. It was not sound strategy because it was a political blunder. It brought the British Empire into the War. One of the ablest of the German Generals told me recently that but for the force of four highly trained British divisions placed on the Belgian frontier the German Army would have outflanked and Sedanised the whole of the French Fifth Army and thus brought the War to a triumphant end on the Western Front. Its presence in that area was to them a disagreeable surprise. They had anticipated meeting a British contingent sooner or later. But they reckoned on its disembarking at Calais or Boulogne, and their spies having informed them that no troops had yet reached those ports, they came to the conclusion that the British Army had not arrived in France. The disembarkation at Havre and the speed with which the Expeditionary Force was sent to France and mustered on the Belgian frontier upset the whole of their calculations and

frustrated their plans. The subtlety, efficiency and celerity with which the British Expeditionary Force was transported to the Belgian frontier without the knowledge of the German Staff was almost entirely due to the genius of Lord Haldane. The way that devoted but intelligent patriot was hounded out of official life by insinuations of treason is one of the most disreputable and stupid episodes in British history. The invasion of Belgium upset the whole carefully elaborated scheme by which the Germans relied on outflanking and capturing a whole French Army. The provocation which brought America into the War was another political blunder, for which the soldiers were primarily responsible. The insistence on taking too many men from food and war production because they were needed at the front was yet another. All these issues enter into strategy and in determining them statesmen must have their say as well as soldiers. In some of them statesmanship is the more important element and statesmen ought to have the final decision—after giving due weight to everything soldiers may have to urge from their point of view.

But there is a region where the soldier claims to be paramount and where the interference of the statesman seems to him to be an impertinence. One is the question of whether a great battle which may involve enormous losses ought to be fought—if so, where and at what time. The second question is whether a prolonged attack on fortifications (practically a *siege*) which is causing huge loss of life without producing any apparent result, ought to be called off. Should Governments intervene or leave the decision entirely to the soldiers? The British Government was doubtful of the wisdom of the combined offensive of September, 1915, in Champagne and Artois. It was one of the costly and fateful mistakes of the War, for whilst the Allies were entangled in an attack doomed to failure on the French Front, Germany was enabled to crush Serbia, bring Bulgaria into the War, capture the Balkans, open up her own road to Turkey, cut our communications with Russia and drive us helter-skelter out of the Dardanelles. Half the number of men we lost in that ill-judged French offensive, if sent in time to the Balkans, would have altered the whole aspect and prospect of the War. The strategical as well as tactical error of judgment then perpetrated by the Army Commanders prolonged the War by two years. Should the Asquith Coalition have exerted its overriding authority and vetoed that offensive? Their chief military adviser, Kitchener, was definitely of the opinion that it was a mistake and could not succeed. They could, therefore, had they vetoed it, claim that in doing so they were acting on the highest military judgment at their disposal. It is true that Kitchener subsequently recommended that it was not advisable to quarrel with the French about it, as Joffre had set his heart on this particular attack, had planned it with great care and was convinced he would be successful in breaking through. Ought the Government to have risked a

misunderstanding with France? They would have been well within their rights as a Government and in doing so they would not have been over-ruling the opinion of their own military staffs as to the prospects of this particular offensive. It is true that had they done so and gone to the aid of Serbia before the blow fell it would have altered the course of the War. But France would have been sore and would always have been convinced that she had been robbed of victory by British stubbornness and stupidity. It was a decision in the realm of strategy which rested with the Government, and rightly so. That they did not exercise an over-riding authority on that occasion was one of the strategical blunders of the War.

The wasteful prolongation of the Somme campaign after it had become clear that a break through the German lines was unattainable was another case where the Government might have intervened. It cost us heavily. The volunteers of 1914 and 1915 were the finest body of men ever sent to do battle for Britain. Five hundred thousand of these men, the flower of our race, were thrown away on a stubborn and unintelligent hammering away at what was then an impenetrable barrier. I strongly urged Mr. Asquith and Sir William Robertson that the useless slaughter ought to be stopped. I am still of that opinion. The loss in men was irreplaceable, less in numbers than in quality. It was the first real disillusionment the new Army suffered. Our losses were twice as great as those we inflicted. The French casualties in this battle for equal or greater results were considerably less than ours. Much was lost, nothing was gained.

The most difficult decision presented to the Government was that of the Passchendaele campaign. I was convinced that it was bound to fail for reasons which I gave in great detail to the Cabinet and to Haig and Robertson before the offensive commenced. These objections were all completely vindicated by the events of the battle. I felt that the losses would be very heavy and that nothing would be achieved. I acknowledged that no doubt the enemy could be pushed back a few kilometres, just as he was on the Somme—at a great sacrifice; but that nothing worth while would be accomplished. Ought I to have vetoed it? I could not have carried the Cabinet with me to that extent. On this occasion all the military and naval advisers of the Government without exception were, in so far as we could ascertain at the time, urgent in their insistence on the desirability and feasibility of the enterprise, and nearly half the Cabinet accepted their opinion. The majority were opposed to taking the responsibility of a veto. I am certain, therefore, that no step I was in a position personally to take would have averted that squalid catastrophe. But ought I not to have resigned rather than acquiesce in this slaughter of brave men? I have always felt there are solid grounds for criticism in that respect. My sole justification is that Haig promised not to press the attack if it became clear that he could not attain his objectives



by continuing the offensive. Robertson endorsed this undertaking. Mr. Bonar Law and Lord Milner, who were as strongly opposed as I was to the whole scheme, thought we ought to be satisfied with this pledge. However, the duty of the Government in the Passchendaele affair will always be a debatable proposition. Was it a decision which ought to have been left to the discretion of the military leaders or should the Government have forbidden the fighting of a battle which they were convinced would entail heavy sacrifices without achieving any military results? I was well within my rights and obligations as Prime Minister in placing before the Generals responsible for military operations the reasons which convinced me that their plans were not practicable and would end in failure. That I did orally and in writing. Even were I in a position to forbid, ought I to have taken that responsibility? On the whole I still give the same answer to that question as I did in June, 1917. The fighting of a battle is mainly a decision for the Generals.

As to the efforts I made persistently to secure unity of command in spite of the possessive reluctance of the military chiefs to part with one ray of their glittering power, I am convinced that in urging one Supreme Command on the principal battle front I was discharging the legitimate function and authority of a Government primarily responsible to King and Country for the conduct of the War. A Government may be unwise to disregard the advice of experts, but in the choice of experts it is the sole judge, and where there are more than one to whom a task is entrusted, it can select the one whose voice is to be supreme.

Generally speaking, the argument of the high Commands in the War for their claim to be the sole judges of military policy was put far too high by them and their partisans. War is not an exact science like chemistry or mathematics where it would be presumption on the part of anyone ignorant of its first rudiments to express an opinion contrary to those who had thoroughly mastered its principles. War is an art, proficiency in which depends more on experience than on study, and more on natural aptitude and judgment than on either. It is said that medicine is an art based on many sciences. But compare the experience acquired by a doctor in the course of his practice with that of the professional soldier. A physician fights a series of battles with the enemy every day and every year of his professional life. That experience adds to his mastery of the art to which he has dedicated his abilities. The same observation applies to law and to politics. The lawyer and the politician, before they reach the age at which our Generals took over the command of our Armies in the War, are already the veterans of a myriad fights. In these incessant struggles they have been confronted with highly skilled adversaries. A soldier may spend his lifetime in barracks or colleges without a day's actual experience of the realities with which he will have to contend if war breaks out.

On August 4th, 1914, not one of our great Commanders had encountered an enemy in battle for 12 years. Even then the experience they had acquired in the only war in which they had taken part had no relevance to the problems of the World War. On the South African veldt horsemanship counted more than howitzers. A fox-hunter was more useful than a machine-gunner. The aeroplane and the tank were unknown and unthought of. Gutchkoff, the Russian Minister of War, saw the South African War and he told a friend of mine that he thought the experience acquired by our soldiers in that war had actually disqualified them for command in the Great War. The fighting was so essentially different in every respect. All the men who filled the highest commands in our Army in France were veterans of the Boer War.

It is not too much to say that when the Great War broke out our Generals had the most important lessons of their art to learn. Before they began they had much to unlearn. Their brains were cluttered with useless lumber, packed in every niche and corner. Some of it was never cleared out to the end of the War. For instance, take their ridiculous cavalry obsession. In a war where artillery and engineering and trench work were more in demand than in any war in history we were led by soldiers trained in the cavalry. Haig was persuaded to the end of the War that a time would come when his troopers would one day charge through the gap made by his artillery and convert the German defeat into a headlong scamper for the Rhine. Needless to say, that chance never came. Generals were in every essential particular inadequately prepared for the contingencies which confronted them in this War. Had they been men of genius—which they were not—they could have adapted themselves more quickly and effectively to the new conditions of war. They were not equipped with that superiority in brains or experience over an amateur steeped in the incidents and needs of the War which would justify the attitude they struck and the note of assured pastmastership they adopted towards all criticism or suggestion from outside or below. The Generals themselves were at least four-fifths amateur, hampered by the wrong training. They knew nothing except by hearsay about the actual fighting of a battle under modern conditions. Haig ordered many bloody battles in this War. He only took part in two, the retreat from Mons and the first Battle of Ypres. And both battles were fought under the old conditions of open warfare. He never even saw the ground on which his greatest battles were fought, either before or during the fight. Robertson never saw a battle. The great Commanders of history, even when they took no physical part in the battle, saw with their own eyes aided or unaided with the telescope the ground upon which it was to be fought and watched the progress of the struggle between the opposing forces. When you come to some of the great essentials of training and preparation for modern warfare,

then neither Haig nor Robertson nor any of their Staff had any previous experience that would give them proficiency. And yet the strategy of the War depended upon these two soldiers and their military advisers.

In the most crucial matters relating to their own profession our leading soldiers had to be helped out by the politician. I have already given in detail an account of the way the Generals muddled the problem of munitions. They did not possess the necessary understanding of the probable character of the War to foresee that it would be a war which would consume a prodigious quantity of shot and shell. What they ordered was of the wrong kind. They preferred shrapnel to high explosive because the former was more useful in the Boer War. What they provided was on the assumption that the War would be conducted in the open field. When it developed into a war of deep digging they did not realise that in order to demolish those improvised ramparts it was essential to equip an army with thousands of guns of a calibre heavier than any yet trundled into the battlefield. A fortress with its flanks on the North Sea and the Swiss mountains, held by millions of men and masses of cannon and machine-guns, was a nightmare they never contemplated in their most disturbed slumbers. It took them months to adapt their strategy to this novel and unforeseen portent. They did not realise that the machine-gun and the hand-grenade would practically take the place of the rifle. Politicians were the first to seize upon the real character of the problem in all these respects and it was they who insisted on the necessary measures being taken—and taken promptly—in order adequately to cope with it. It was politicians who initiated and organised these measures. In doing so, at each stage they had to overcome the rooted traditions, prejudices and practices of military staffs. It was politicians who insisted upon the importance of providing sufficient and suitable transport facilities behind the line on a great scale in order not only to bring up supplies, but to increase the mobility of the Army along the whole front. It was civilians, chosen by politicians, who reorganised and developed these facilities. It was politicians who foresaw that any attempt to break through the immense fortifications thrown up by the enemy on the Western Front would involve enormous carnage and a prolongation of this destructive war. It was they who urged the finding of a way round on the most vulnerable fronts. It was politicians who urged the importance of making the best use of the magnificent and almost inexhaustible fighting manpower in Russia and the Balkans by providing them with the necessary equipment to play their part in attacking the enemy on his Eastern and Southern Fronts. It was amateurs who were principally responsible for the tank, easily the most formidable of our weapons, and it was they who invented and urged the use of one of the most serviceable machines of the War, the Stokes mortar. It was a civilian



who invented the hydrophone which located the deadly submarine and enabled us to hunt it down in the pathless depths of the sea.

Let anyone read the history of the War with care and then conjecture what would have happened if the ignorant and cold-shouldered civilian had not insisted on coming to the rescue of the military in the discharge of those functions which in peace and war constituted an essential part of the duties and responsibilities of the latter. I have not perused a history written by or on behalf of these great Generals which recognises fairly and generously the contribution rendered to the achievement of victory by the unwelcome intervention of the amateur untrained in military colleges or on parade grounds.

Looking back on this devastating War and surveying the part played in it by statesmen and soldiers respectively in its direction, I have come definitely to the conclusion that the former showed too much caution in exerting their authority over the military leaders. They might have done so either by a direct and imperative order from the Government or by making representations followed, if those were not effective in answering the purpose, by a change in the military leadership. The latter method of procedure would no doubt have been the sounder and wiser course to pursue had it been feasible. The difficulty, however, all Governments experienced was in discovering capable commanders who could have been relied upon not only to carry out their policy but to do so efficiently and skilfully. The long siege warfare did not provide opportunities for resourceful men to come to the top by a display of superior skill. There was a rigidity and restrictiveness about the methods employed which allowed no play for initiative, imagination and inventiveness. The orders issued to divisional and brigadier Generals and to Colonels from headquarters were precise and could not be deviated from in any particular without risking a charge of insubordination. The men on the heights offered no encouragement or chances to genius down below. The distance between the châteaux and dugouts was as great as that from the fixed stars to the caverns of earth. No telescope was powerful enough to discern talent at that depth, even if a look-out were being kept. That is one reason why no one reached the highest ranks in the British Army except those who were there or thereabout when the War began. No civilian rose above the rank of Brigadier, although there must have been hundreds of thousands who had years of experience in the fighting line—many of them men of exceptional capacity. Thousands of these men had passed through our Secondary Schools, hundreds through our Universities, and not a few with distinction. It is incredible that amongst men of that training and quality there should not have been found one, fit for high promotion, after years of greater experience of fighting under modern conditions than any General in the field had acquired. The regular Army before the War numbered something over 250,000. During the War four or

five million young men drawn from every class of the community passed through its ranks. The wider the range of choice the better the chance of finding the right men for leadership. Besides, the Army was never considered to be a career for the talents. Rather the reverse. Boys who were endowed with brains above their fellows sought other professions where talent was more welcome and better requited. Independent thinking is not encouraged in a professional Army. It is a form of mutiny. Obedience is the supreme virtue. Theirs not to reason why. Orders are to be carried out and not canvassed. Criticism is insubordination. The object of discipline is to accustom men to respond to a command instantly, by instant action, without thought of effect or consequence. There were many intelligent officers and men who knew that the orders given them during the War were utterly stupid and must have been given by Staffs who had no understanding of the conditions. But orders were orders. And with their men they went to a doom they foresaw was inevitable. Such an instinctive obedience to the word of command is essential to the efficiency of a body of men who have to face terror, death or mutilation in the discharge of their terrible duties. But a long course of mental subservience and suppression cramps the development and suppleness of the intellect. It makes "an officer and a gentleman" but it is not conducive to the building up of an alert, adaptable and resourceful leader of men.

Haig's summary of the qualities of the French officers he met is a condemnation of the rigidity of the system. The average and commonplace men of distinguished form he picked out as "gentlemanly" and "fine soldiers." The one man of genius among them he giped at as a blatherer. In such a system promotion is a moving staircase where the man who sticks on is sure of promotion. Wheedling, pushing, intriguing enables some to wriggle through the crowd in front of him—but intellect is out of place and strength does not count. In the grand Army that fought the World War the ablest brains did not climb to the top of the stairs and they did not reach a height where politicians could even see them. Seniority and Society were the dominant factors in Army promotion. Deportment counted a good deal. Brains came a bad fourth. Men of great intellectual powers are not tempted to join a profession which offers so little scope for the exercise of their powers and where the awards have no particular reference to special capacity. To be a good average is safer than to be gifted above your fellows. The only exceptions were to be found in the Dominion forces. General Currie, the Commander of the Canadian Army, and General Monash, the Commander of the Australian Army, were both in civil life when the War broke out. Both proved themselves to be brilliant military leaders and went right through to the top. It means they had a natural aptitude for soldiering and that the fact of their being officers in unprofessional armies gave full play to their gifts.

Monash was, according to the testimony of those who knew well his genius for war and what he accomplished by it, the most resourceful General in the whole of the British Army. But the tradition of the Dominions in the occupations of peace and war is encouraging to fresh talent. For this and other reasons the British Government experienced a difficulty in securing for the Supreme Command the services of the ablest man which their great armies could have provided. There was no conspicuous officer in the Army who seemed to be better qualified for the Highest Command than Haig. That is to say, there was no outstanding General fit for so overwhelming a position as the command of a force five times as great as the largest army ever commanded by Napoleon, and many more times the size of any army led by Alexander, Hannibal or Cæsar. I have no doubt these great men would have risen to the occasion, but such highly gifted men as the British Army possessed were consigned to the mud by orders of men superior in rank but inferior in capacity, who themselves kept at a safe distance from the slime which they had chosen as the terrain where their plans were to operate.

The solicitude with which most Generals in high places (there were honourable exceptions) avoided personal jeopardy is one of the debatable novelties of modern warfare. Generals cannot any longer be expected to lead their men over the top with pointing sword. But this departure from the established methods of leadership by personal example has gone too far. Admirals of a rank corresponding to that held by the Army Commanders took exactly the same hazards in action as the humblest sailor in their fleet. Beatty was a man of dauntless intrepidity who sought danger. His flagship was hit in the Dogger Bank fight and it was just as liable to be blown up at Jutland as the *Defence* and the *Invincible*. The Rear-Admirals commanding these battle cruisers were killed when their ships were sunk. Jellicoe was not altogether free from personal peril in the Jutland mists. When a naval battle is fought G.H.Q. moves into the battle zone. Every child knows the story of Zeebrugge, the one naval exploit of the War that moved and still moves the imagination of the nation. Sir Roger Keyes, the Admiral who directed the attack, had the unmistakable Nelson touch and took just as great personal risks as that redoubtable sailor ever faced. When High Admirals are not immune from the jeopardy of war there is no reason why exalted Generals should be sacrosanct. It is a new thing in war for generals who never set eyes on a position to command their soldiers to attack it without the slightest intention of placing themselves in any peril by leading the attack themselves, or even in viewing the ground before action or coming near the battle whilst it is proceeding to its deadly end. It is certainly a novelty in war that military leaders swathed in comfort and security should doom hundreds of thousands of their bravest soldiers to lodge for weeks in slimy puddles with Death as their fellow lodger,



without even taking the precaution of finding out for themselves what the conditions are or are likely to become. In the olden days when commanders so directed a battle that it ended in a shambles for their own army, they ran the risk of being themselves numbered with the slain. Even after muskets and cannon had become the most important weapons in war, Napoleon faced both in leading his troops. Wellington had a General shot at his side in the Battle of Waterloo and another was killed in the same battle in charging the enemy at the head of his troops. Mr. Winston Churchill describes how Marlborough crept through the corn to within a few yards of a French parapet bristling with guns just before a battle in order to judge whether an attack there was a feasible operation. When he found that it did not offer a fair chance of success to his men, he ordered them to retire. Cromwell and Rupert charged at the head of their troopers, Cæsar went into action to rally his men at great risk to his life. Stonewall Jackson constantly faced personal hazard and was ultimately killed taking risks in examining the battle-ground. Some of the assaults on impossible positions ordered by our Generals would never have been decreed if they had seen beforehand with their own eyes the hopeless slaughter to which their orders doomed their men. To suggest otherwise would be a base calumny on Generals.

No amount of circumspection can prevent war leading to the death of multitudes of brave men, but now that Generals are not partaking in the personal hazards of a fight, they ought to take greater personal risks in satisfying themselves as to the feasibility of their plans and as to whether the objectives they wish to attain are worth the sacrifice entailed, and whether there is no better way of achieving the same result at less cost of gallant lives.

## APPENDIX

### TERMS OF ARMISTICE WITH GERMANY

BETWEEN MARSHAL FOCH, Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies, acting in the name of the Allied and Associated Powers with ADMIRAL WEMYSS, First Sea Lord, on the one hand, and

HERR ERZBERGER, Secretary of State, President of the  
German Delegation,  
COUNT VON OBERNDORFF, Envoy Extraordinary and  
Minister Plenipotentiary,  
MAJOR-GENERAL VON WINTERFELDT,  
CAPTAIN VANSELOW (German Navy),

duly empowered and acting with the concurrence of the German Chancellor on the other hand.

An Armistice has been concluded on the following conditions:—

#### CONDITIONS OF THE ARMISTICE CONCLUDED WITH GERMANY.

##### *A. Clauses Relating to the Western Front.*

I. Cessation of hostilities by land and in the air six hours after the signing of the Armistice.

II. Immediate evacuation of the invaded countries—Belgium, France, Luxemburg, as well as Alsace-Lorraine—so ordered as to be completed within 15 days from the signature of the Armistice.

German troops which have not left the above-mentioned territories within the period fixed shall be made prisoners of war.

Occupation by the Allied and United States Forces jointly shall keep pace with the evacuation in these areas.

All movements of evacuation and occupation shall be regulated in accordance with a Note (Annexe 1) determined at the time of the signing of the Armistice.

III. Repatriation, beginning at once, to be completed within 15 days, of all inhabitants of the countries above enumerated (including hostages, persons under trial, or condemned).

IV. Surrender in good condition by the German Armies of the following equipment:—

5,000 guns (2,500 heavy, 2,500 field).  
 25,000 machine guns.  
 3,000 trench mortars.  
 1,700 aeroplanes (fighters, bombers—  
 firstly all D.7's and night-bombing machines).

The above to be delivered *in situ* to the Allied and United States troops in accordance with the detailed conditions laid down in the Note (Annexe 1) determined at the time of the signing of the Armistice.

V. Evacuation by the German Armies of the districts on the left bank of the Rhine. These districts on the left bank of the Rhine shall be administered by the local authorities under the control of the Allied and United States Armies of Occupation.

The occupation of these territories by Allied and United States troops shall be assured by garrisons holding the principal crossings of the Rhine (Mainz, Coblenz, Cologne), together with bridgeheads at these points of a 30-kilometre (about 19 miles) radius on the right bank, and by garrisons similarly holding the strategic points of the area.

A neutral zone shall be reserved on the right bank of the Rhine, between the river and a line drawn parallel to the bridgeheads and to the river and 10 kilometres ( $6\frac{1}{4}$  miles) distant from them, between the Dutch frontier and the Swiss frontier.

The evacuation by the enemy of the Rhine districts (right and left banks) shall be so ordered as to be completed within a further period of 16 days, in all 31 days, after the signing of the Armistice.

All movements of evacuation and occupation shall be regulated according to the Note (Annexe 1) determined at the time of the signing of the Armistice.

VI. In all territories evacuated by the enemy, evacuation of the inhabitants shall be forbidden; no damage or harm shall be done to the persons or property of the inhabitants.

No person shall be prosecuted for having taken part in any military measures previous to the signing of the Armistice.

No destruction of any kind to be committed.

Military establishments of all kinds shall be delivered intact, as well as military stores, food, munitions and equipment, which shall not have been removed during the periods fixed for evacuation.

Stores of food of all kinds for the civil population, cattle, &c., shall be left *in situ*.

No measure of a general character shall be taken, and no official order shall be given which would have as a consequence the depreciation of industrial establishments or a reduction of their personnel.

VII. Roads and means of communication of every kind, railroads,



waterways, roads, bridges, telegraphs, telephones shall be in no manner impaired.

All civil and military personnel at present employed on them shall remain.

5,000 locomotives and 150,000 wagons, in good working order, with all necessary spare parts and fittings, shall be delivered to the Associated Powers within the period fixed in Annexe No. 2 (not exceeding 31 days in all).

5,000 motor lorries are also to be delivered in good condition within 36 days.

The railways of Alsace-Lorraine shall be handed over within 31 days, together with all personnel and material belonging to the organisation of this system.

Further, the necessary working material in the territories on the left bank of the Rhine shall be left *in situ*.

All stores of coal and material for the upkeep of permanent way, signals and repair shops shall be left *in situ* and kept in an efficient state by Germany, so far as the working of the means of communication on the left bank of the Rhine is concerned.

All lighters taken from the Allies shall be restored to them.

The Note attached as Annexe 2 defines the details of these measures.

VIII. The German Command shall be responsible for revealing within 48 hours after the signing of the Armistice, all mines or delay-action fuses disposed on territories evacuated by the German troops, and shall assist in their discovery and destruction.

The German Command shall also reveal all destructive measures that may have been taken (such as poisoning or pollution of wells, springs, &c.).

Breaches of these clauses will involve reprisals.

IX. The right of requisition shall be exercised by the Allied and United States Armies in all occupied territories, save for settlement of accounts with authorised persons.

The upkeep of the troops of occupation in the Rhine districts (excluding Alsace-Lorraine) shall be charged to the German Government.

X. The immediate repatriation, without reciprocity, according to detailed conditions which shall be fixed, of all Allied and United States prisoners of war, including those under trial and condemned. The Allied Powers and the United States of America shall be able to dispose of these prisoners as they think fit. This condition annuls all other conventions regarding prisoners of war, including that of July, 1918, now being ratified. However, the return of German prisoners of war interned in Holland and Switzerland shall continue as heretofore. The return of German prisoners of war shall be settled at the conclusion of the Peace preliminaries.

XI. Sick and wounded who cannot be removed from territory evacuated by the German forces shall be cared for by German personnel, who shall be left on the spot with the material required.

*B. Clauses relating to the Eastern Frontiers of Germany.*

XII. All German troops at present in any territory which before the war formed part of Austria-Hungary, Roumania or Turkey, shall withdraw within the frontiers of Germany as they existed on 1st August, 1914, and all German troops at present in territories, which before the war formed part of Russia, must likewise return to within the frontiers of Germany as above defined, as soon as the Allies shall think the moment suitable, having regard to the internal situation of these territories.

XIII. Evacuation of German troops, to begin at once, and all German instructors, prisoners and agents, civilian as well as military, now on the territory of Russia (frontiers as defined on 1st August, 1914), to be recalled.

XIV. German troops to cease at once all requisitions and seizures and any other coercive measures with a view to obtaining supplies intended for Germany in Roumania and Russia (frontiers as defined on 1st August, 1914).

XV. Annulment of the treaties of Bucharest and Brest-Litovsk and of the supplementary treaties.

XVI. The Allies shall have free access to the territories evacuated by the Germans on their Eastern frontier, either through Danzig or by the Vistula, in order to convey supplies to the population of these territories or for the purpose of maintaining order.

*C. Clause relating to East Africa.*

XVII. Evacuation of all German forces operating in East Africa within a period specified by the Allies.

*D. General Clauses.*

XVIII. Repatriation without reciprocity, within a maximum period of one month, in accordance with detailed conditions hereafter to be fixed, of all interned civilians, including hostages and persons under trial and condemned, who may be subjects of Allied or Associated States other than those mentioned in Clause III.

*Financial Clauses.*

XIX. With the reservation that any subsequent concessions and claims by the Allies and United States remain unaffected, the following financial conditions are imposed:—

Reparation for damage done.

While the Armistice lasts, no public securities shall be removed by the enemy which can serve as a pledge to the Allies to cover reparation for war losses.

Immediate restitution of the cash deposit in the National Bank of Belgium and, in general, immediate return of all documents, specie, stock, shares, paper money, together with plant for the issue thereof, affecting public or private interests in the invaded countries.

Restitution of the Russian and Roumanian gold yielded to Germany or taken by that Power.

This gold to be delivered in trust to the Allies until peace is concluded.

### *E. Naval Conditions.*

XX. Immediate cessation of all hostilities at sea, and definite information to be given as to the position and movements of all German ships.

Notification to be given to neutrals that freedom of navigation in all territorial waters is given to the Navies and Mercantile Marines of the Allied and Associated Powers all question of neutrality being waived.

XXI. All Naval and Mercantile Marine prisoners of war of the Allied and Associated Powers in German hands to be returned, without reciprocity.

XXII. To surrender at the ports specified by the Allies and the United States all submarines at present in existence (including all submarine cruisers and minelayers) with armament and equipment complete. Those that cannot put to sea shall be deprived of armament and equipment, and shall remain under the supervision of the Allies and the United States. Submarines ready to put to sea shall be prepared to leave German ports immediately on receipt of a wireless order to sail to the port of surrender, the remainder to follow as early as possible. The conditions of this Article shall be completed within 14 days of the signing of the Armistice.

XXIII. The following German surface warships, which shall be designated by the Allies and the United States of America, shall forthwith be disarmed and thereafter interned in neutral ports, or, failing them, Allied ports, to be designated by the Allies and the United States of America, and placed under the surveillance of the Allies and the United States of America, only care and maintenance parties being left on board, namely:—

6 battle cruisers.

10 battleships.

8 light cruisers (including two minelayers).

50 destroyers of the most modern types.



All other surface warships (including river craft) are to be concentrated in German Naval bases, to be designated by the Allies and the United States of America, completely disarmed and placed under the supervision of the Allies and the United States of America. All vessels of the Auxiliary Fleet are to be disarmed. All vessels specified for internment shall be ready to leave German ports seven days after the signing of the Armistice. Directions for the voyage shall be given by wireless.

XXIV. The Allies and the United States of America shall have the right to sweep up all minefields and destroy all obstructions laid by Germany outside German territorial waters, and the positions of these are to be indicated.

XXV. Freedom of access to and from the Baltic to be given to the Navies and Mercantile Marines of the Allied and Associated Powers. This to be secured by the occupation of all German forts, fortifications, batteries and defence works of all kinds in all the routes from the Cattegat into the Baltic, and by the sweeping up and destruction of all mines and obstructions within and without German territorial waters without any questions of neutrality being raised by Germany, and the positions of all such mines and obstructions to be indicated, and the plans relating thereto are to be supplied.

XXVI. The existing blockade conditions set up by the Allied and Associated Powers are to remain unchanged, and all German merchant ships found at sea are to remain liable to capture. The Allies and United States contemplate the provisioning of Germany during the Armistice as shall be found necessary.

XXVII. All Aerial Forces are to be concentrated and immobilized in German bases to be specified by the Allies and the United States of America.

XXVIII. In evacuating the Belgian coasts and ports, Germany shall abandon, *in situ* and intact, the port material and material for inland waterways, also all merchant ships, tugs and lighters, all Naval aircraft and air materials and stores, all arms and armaments and all stores and apparatus of all kinds.

XXIX. All Black Sea ports are to be evacuated by Germany; all Russian warships of all descriptions seized by Germany in the Black Sea are to be handed over to the Allies and the United States of America; all neutral merchant ships seized in the Black Sea are to be released; all warlike and other materials of all kinds seized in those ports are to be returned, and German materials as specified in Clause XXVIII are to be abandoned.

XXX. All merchant ships at present in German hands belonging to the Allied and Associated Powers are to be restored to ports specified by the Allies and the United States of America without reciprocity.

XXXI. No destruction of ships or of materials to be permitted before evacuation, surrender or restoration.

XXXII. The German Government shall formally notify all the neutral Governments, and particularly the Governments of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Holland that all restrictions placed on the trading of their vessels with the Allied and Associated countries, whether by the German Government or by private German interests, and whether in return for specific concessions, such as the export of shipbuilding materials or not, are immediately cancelled.

XXXIII. No transfers of German merchant shipping, of any description, to any neutral flag are to take place after signature of the Armistice.

#### *F. Duration of Armistice.*

XXXIV. The duration of the Armistice is to be 36 days, with option to extend. During this period, on failure of execution of any of the above clauses, the Armistice may be repudiated by one of the contracting parties on 48 hours' previous notice. It is understood that failure to execute Articles III and XVIII completely in the periods specified is not to give reason for a repudiation of the Armistice, save where such failure is due to malice aforethought.

To ensure the execution of the present convention under the most favourable conditions, the principle of a permanent International Armistice Commission is recognised. This Commission shall act under the supreme authority of the High Command, military and naval, of the Allied Armies.

The present Armistice was signed on the 11th day of November, 1918, at 5 o'clock a.m. (French time).

F. FOCH.

R. E. WEMYSS.

ERZBERGER.

OBERNDORFF.

WINTERFELDT.

VANSELOW.

11th November, 1918.

The representatives of the Allies declare that, in view of fresh events, it appears necessary to them that the following condition shall be added to the clauses of the Armistice:—

“In case the German ships are not handed over within the periods specified, the Governments of the Allies and of the United States shall have the right to occupy Heligoland to ensure their delivery.”

R. E. WEMYSS,  
Admiral.

F. FOCH.

"The German delegates declare that they will forward this declaration to the German Chancellor, with the recommendation that it be accepted, accompanying it with the reasons by which the Allies have been actuated in making this demand."

ERZBERGER.

OBERNDORFF.

WINTERFELDT.

VANSELOW.

#### ANNEXE No. 1

I. The evacuation of the invaded territories, Belgium, France and Luxemburg, and also of Alsace-Lorraine, shall be carried out in three successive stages according to the following conditions:—

1st stage. Evacuation of the territories situated between the existing front and line No. 1 on the enclosed map, to be completed within 5 days after the signature of the Armistice.

2nd stage. Evacuation of territories situated between line No. 1 and line No. 2, to be carried out within 4 further days (9 days in all after the signing of the Armistice).

3rd stage. Evacuation of the territories situated between line No. 2 and line No. 3, to be completed within 6 further days (15 days in all after the signing of the Armistice).

Allied and United States troops shall enter these various territories on the expiration of the period allowed to the German troops for the evacuation of each.

In consequence, the Allied troops will cross the present German front as from the 6th day following the signing of the Armistice, line No. 1 as from the 10th day, and line No. 2 as from the 16th day.

II. *Evacuation of the Rhine district.* This evacuation shall also be carried out in several successive stages:—

(1) Evacuation of territories situated between lines 2 and 3 and line 4, to be completed within 4 further days (19 days in all after the signing of the Armistice).

(2) Evacuation of territories situated between lines 4 and 5 to be completed within 4 further days (23 days in all after the signing of the Armistice).

(3) Evacuation of territories situated between lines 5 and 6 (line of the Rhine) to be completed within 4 further days (27 days in all after the signing of the Armistice).

(4) Evacuation of the bridgeheads and of the neutral zone on the right bank of the Rhine to be completed within 4 further days (31 days in all after the signing of the Armistice).



The Allied and United States Army of Occupation shall enter these various territories after the expiration of the period allowed to the German troops for the evacuation of each; consequently the Army will cross line No. 3, 20 days after the signing of the Armistice. It will cross line No. 4 as from the 24th day after the signing of the Armistice; Line No. 5 as from the 28th day; Line No. 6 (Rhine) the 32nd day, in order to occupy the bridgeheads.

### III. *Surrender by the German Armies of war material specified by the Armistice.*

This war material shall be surrendered according to the following conditions: The first half before the 10th day, the second half before the 20th day. This material shall be handed over to each of the Allied and United States Armies by each larger tactical group of the German Armies in the proportions which may be fixed by the permanent international Armistice Commission.

#### ANNEXE No. 2

Conditions regarding communications, railways, waterways, roads, river and sea ports, and telegraphic and telephonic communications: —

I. All communications as far as the Rhine, inclusive, or comprised, on the right bank of this river, within the bridgeheads occupied by the Allied Armies shall be placed under the supreme and absolute authority of the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies, who shall have the right to take any measure he may think necessary to assure their occupation and use. All documents relative to communications shall be held ready for transmission to him.

II. All the material and all the civil and military personnel at present employed in the maintenance and working of all lines of communication are to be maintained in their entirety upon these lines in all territories evacuated by the German troops.

All supplementary material necessary for the upkeep of these lines of communication in the districts on the left bank of the Rhine shall be supplied by the German Government throughout the duration of the Armistice.

III. Personnel. The French and Belgian personnel belonging to the services of the lines of communications, whether interned or not, are to be returned to the French and Belgian Armies during the 15 days following the signing of the Armistice. The personnel belonging to the organisation of the Alsace-Lorraine railway system is to be maintained or reinstated in such a way as to ensure the working of the system.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies shall have the right to make all the changes and substitutions that he may desire in the personnel of the lines of communication.

IV. Material—(a) *Rolling stock*. The rolling stock handed over to the Allied Armies in the zone comprised between the present front and Line No. 3, not including Alsace-Lorraine, shall amount at least to 5,000 locomotives and 150,000 waggons. This surrender shall be carried out within the period fixed by Clause 7 of the Armistice and under conditions, the details of which shall be fixed by the permanent International Armistice Commission.

All this material is to be in good condition and in working order, with all the ordinary spare parts and fittings. It may be employed together with the regular personnel, or with any other, upon any part of the railway system of the Allied Armies.

The material necessary for the working of the Alsace-Lorraine railway system is to be maintained or replaced for the use of the French Army.

The material to be left *in situ* in the territories on the left bank of the Rhine, as well as that on the inner side of the bridgeheads, must permit of the normal working of the railways in these districts.

(b) *Permanent way, signals and workshops*. The material for signals, machine tools and tool outfits, taken from the workshops and depots of the French and Belgian lines, are to be replaced under conditions, the details of which are to be arranged by the permanent International Armistice Commission.

The Allied Armies are to be supplied with railroad materials, rails, incidental fittings, plant, bridge-building material and timber necessary for the repair of the lines destroyed beyond the present front.

(c) *Fuel and maintenance material*. The German Government shall be responsible throughout the duration of the Armistice for the release of fuel and maintenance material to the depots normally allotted to the railways in the territories on the left bank of the Rhine.

V. *Telegraphic and Telephonic Communications*. All telegraphs, telephones and fixed W/T stations are to be handed over to the Allied Armies, with all the civil and military personnel and all their material, including all stores on the left bank of the Rhine.

Supplementary stores necessary for the upkeep of the system are to be supplied throughout the duration of the Armistice by the German Government according to requirements.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies shall place this system under military supervision and shall ensure its control, and shall make all changes and substitutions in personnel which he may think necessary.

He will send back to the German Army all the military personnel who are not in his judgment necessary for the working and upkeep of the railway.

All plans of the German telegraphic and telephonic systems shall be handed over to the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies.

# LIST OF MAPS, DOCUMENTS, ETC.

	PAGE
Facsimile of the British Cabinet's first intimation of the outbreak of War . . . . .	46
"Delivering the Goods" . . . . .	118
Facsimile of a letter written on the 25th of May, 1915, by Mr. Asquith to Mr. Lloyd George . . . . .	140-1
Map showing the successive Russian retreats in August, 1915	271
Facsimile of a note passed by Sir Edward Carson to Mr. Lloyd George during a Cabinet meeting in September, 1915	310
Facsimile of a memorandum, drafted by Sir Eric Geddes and initialled by Lord Kitchener, dealing with the supply of machine-guns to the Armies . . . . .	361
Facsimile of table supplied by Sir Eric Geddes to Mr. Lloyd George, showing the remarkable increase in Shell Production . . . . .	386-7
Facsimile of the letter written by Mr. Asquith which induced Mr. Lloyd George to abandon his proposed visit to Russia with Lord Kitchener . . . . .	419
"The New Conductor" . . . . .	656
Chart showing British Shipping Losses . . . . .	710
Western Front, November, 1916. Offensives proposed by Joffre . . . . .	878
Western Front, January and March, 1917. Offensives proposed by Nivelle . . . . .	879
Mr. Hughes at a Cabinet Conference, 1916 . . . . .	1033
Map showing Turkish Railways in Asia Minor . . . . .	1073
The Sailors refuse to take Mr. Ramsay MacDonald to the Stockholm Conference . . . . .	1155
Map of Passchendaele Battlefield, 1917 . . . . .	1273
Map of the Ypres Salient . . . . .	1326
Map of the Passchendaele Salient . . . . .	1327
Map showing Gains and Losses at Cambrai . . . . .	1336
Map showing Extension of the British Front, January, 1918	1654
Map to illustrate the March Retreat, 1918 . . . . .	1723
Map to illustrate German Offensive on the Lys, April, 1918	1761
Facsimile letter from Marshal Foch, 24th July, 1918 . . . . .	1854
Map showing the Allied Line on 11th November, 1918 . . . . .	1883
Extracts from M. Foch's letter to Mr. Lloyd George of 23rd August, 1919 . . . . .	2027



# INDEX

**ADAN**, Indian troops occupy, 481.  
**BBEVILLE**, Allied Conference at (1/5/18), 1749; extract from Report of, 1775-7.  
**BOUKIR**, Battle of, 1564.  
**CLAND, ARTHUR**, on *Asquith*, 601.  
**CLAND, SIR FRANCIS**, Trevelyan's letter to on subject of Balkans, 236-8; fertilisers and, 775.  
**CLAND COMMITTEE ON FERTILISERS**, set up, 775.  
**DAMS, PROFESSOR**, secretary to Lloyd George, 643.  
**DDAMS, JANE**, tells Lloyd George of Austrian desire for peace, 1207.  
**DDISON, DR. CHRISTOPHER**, at Ministry of Munitions, 151, 167; Woolwich labour troubles and, 468-9; takes canvass of Liberals to discover supporters of Lloyd George, 621-2; helpfulness of, 640; American Mission and, 995; assistance given to Lord Cowdray by, 1102; becomes Minister of Reconstruction, 1159.  
**DMIRALTY**, ahead of the War Office in desire to make use of new inventions, 370; confesses its impotence in face of submarine menace, 673; its ineffectuality in dealing with submarines, 674-5; obstinately opposes Convoy system, 677 *et seq.*; official views on Convoy system, 680; underestimates seamanship of merchant skippers, 681; makes an elementary arithmetical blunder about the number of ships using British ports, 682-3; stunned, 683; Lloyd George's decision to attend Board, 691; frosty welcome extended to Maclay, 727; unsuccessfully fights proposal to transfer Transport Department to Shipping Ministry, 729-30; appointment of Controller of Naval Shipbuilding suggested, 733-4; impotence of, 771; crushes Joint War Air Committee, 1097-8; persistently obstructs Air Board, 1098-9 *et seq.*; opposed to Air Ministry's control of Royal Naval Air Service, 1109; blamed for Passchendaele campaign, 1249; hopes to have Ostend and Zeebrugge taken by military measures, 1252. [See also Convoy System and Submarine Warfare.]  
**DMIRALTY BOARD OF INVENTIONS AND RESEARCH** set up, 368.  
**DMIRALTY LANDSHIPS COMMITTEE**, Churchill sets up, 370.  
**DROPLANES**, conflicts and muddles over, 582-3; fiasco of American, 1832. [See also *entries under Air*.]  
**GHANISTAN**, Anglo-Russian tension over, 10.  
**TRICA, EAST**, British successes in, 1454.  
**TRICA, UNION OF SOUTH**, part played by in War, 1023-4, 2009.  
**GADIR CRISIS**, 24 *et seq.*, 29, 30, 38.

**AGNEW, LOCKETT**, 146.  
**AGRICULTURE**, employment of women in, 772-3; mechanisation of, 774-5; fertiliser problem, 775-6; yield of crops in 1917, 777; shortage of ploughmen hampers progress, 778-9; success of wheat production drive, 780-2; returns for 1918, 782-3; Junkers oppose further reforms in 1919, 783-5; development of allotments, 785-7; manpower needed for, 1565. [See also *many entries under Food*.]  
**AIR BOARD**, appointment of, 1098; first Report of, 1099; draft conclusions of War Committee on scope of, 1100-1; constitution and functions of, 1102; deficiencies of, 1107-8.  
**AIR COMMITTEE**, Lord Derby's Joint War, setting up of, and collapse of, 1097-8.  
**AIR FORCE**, increasing importance of, 1588.  
**AIR MINISTRY**, proposed, 1108-9; Bill passed, 1110; Cowdray resigns, and is succeeded by Rothermere, 1112-3; Rothermere resigns, and is succeeded by Sir W. Weir, 1113-5.  
**AIR ORGANISATION**, Prime Minister's Committee on, terms of reference of, 1106; proposals of, 1107-9.  
**AIR POLICY COMMITTEE**, setting up of, 1109.  
**AIR-RAIDS**, public exasperation at, 1097-8; measures taken to prevent, 1104 *et seq.*; proposals for defence of London against, 1106-7.  
**AISNE**, French offensive of 16/4/17 on, 904-5; strategic aim of German attack on, 1837; commencement of offensive on (27/5/18), 1840; close of Battle of, 1845.  
**ALBRICCI, GENERAL**, is not eager for Italian Front offensive during 1917, 1381.  
**ALEPPO**, capture of, 1926.  
**ALEXANDRA, QUEEN OF ENGLAND**, her letters to Czarina are not delivered, 974-5.  
**ALEXANDRA, CZARINA OF RUSSIA**, hostility towards, 943; Rasputin's influence over, 956-7.  
**ALEXANDROVICH, GRAND DUKE SERGE**, 1527.  
**ALEXEIEFF, GENERAL**, Robertson and, 462; his Balkan dispatches, 553-4; Allied co-ordination and, 554; his authority in Russia, 555; Allies prevent interference from, 573; opposed to premature Roumanian intervention, 819; opposed to offensive, 921; not present at Petrograd Conference, 933; in plot to depose Czar, 958; to escort Czar to Tsarskoe Selo, 972; opposed to plans for Passchendaele campaign, 1299; not capable of facing great crises, 1538; defeated by Bolsheviks, 1887.  
**ALGECIRAS**, Treaty of, France and, 25.  
**"ALGONQUIN,"** sinking of, 989.

- ALI (son of Sherif of Mecca), attacks the Turks, 1075.
- ALLENBY, FIELD-MARSHAL LORD, 1081; succeeds Murray in Palestine, 1089; captures Gaza, Beersheba and Jerusalem, 1090-1; disputes as to reinforcements for, 1092-4; 1331, 1332, 1675-6, 1864; destroys last remnants of Turkish Army, 1879; Smuts and, 1922; his courage and vigour, 1922-3; possesses brains and imagination, 1923; his forces depleted to reinforce Western Front, 1923-4; the brilliance of his victory, 1925-6; 1948; on his Palestine campaign, 2000-1; 2008.
- ALLIED CONFERENCES. *See under* Inter-Allied Conference.
- ALSACE AND LORRAINE, Franco-German antagonism and, 2; Balfour on, 661; Paléologue's Russian note of 14/2/17 and, 948; Austrian peace move and, 1178-9 *et seq.*; Snowden on, 1214; Kuhlmann and, 1241, 1244; Mensdorff and, 1486. [*See also under* Peace.]
- AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF ENGINEERS, Treasury Agreement and, 179; Munitions of War (Amendment) Bill and, 188-9; shop stewards and, 1146; strike of April and May, 1917, and, 1148, 1149-51.
- AMARA, capture of, 482.
- AMERICA, UNITED STATES OF, Allied relations with, 393-403; waits to see which side is winning, 553; attitude to War in 1917, 977 *et seq.*; Presidential election of 1916, 977-9; conditions that threatened neutrality of, 980; Germany's contempt for, 983; severs diplomatic relations with Germany, 984; proposed German-Mexican alliance and, 988-9; declares war on Germany; 990; effects of her declaration of war in Allied countries and in Germany, 993-4; financial relations with England, 1006-8; tardy entry of her troops into fight, 1009; confiscates ships ordered by Britain, 1009 *et seq.*; ignorance of War finance and distrust of Allies in, 1013-4; her loans to Britain, 1014 *et seq.*; her first military efforts, 1021-2; Allies hope for intervention of, 1262-3; invited to attend Allied Conferences, 1417; importance of her entry into War, 1456-7; German estimate of menace of, 1475; question of when her soldiers would be ready to fight, 1636; British G.H.Q. despises help from, 1745; her armies in France, 1792 *et seq.*; position of her armies in April, 1918, 1820; victory for Allies depends on immediate utilisation of her troops, 1821; compromise agreement reached on use of troops of, on 21/4/18, 1822; another compromise agreement on troops, 1827-8; importance of her contribution to War, 1828-9; blunders and delays in equipping armies, 1830-1, 1832-3; Balfour's despatch to, on question of Japanese intervention in Russia, 1898-9. [*See also next entries and* Wilson, Woodrow.]
- AMERICA (UNITED STATES OF), BRITISH MISSION TO, suggestion of approved, 993; instructions given to, 994-5; personnel of, 997; first impression of, one of chaos, 997; placed on permanent basis, 1000; Northcliffe as head of, 1000 *et seq.*; Northcliffe praises, 1110.
- AMERICA (UNITED STATES OF), FRENCH MISSION TO, Viviani at head of, 995.
- AMERICAN MISSION TO EUROPE, composition of, 1795-6; Lloyd George's speech to, 1796-1800.
- AMERICAN RAILWAY COMMISSION (Russia) 1529.
- AMERICAN RELIEF COMMITTEE, 1278.
- AMERICANS, at Hamel, 1845-6; cover themselves with glory in advance from Villers-Cotterets, 1848; Hindenburg and Ludendorff on value of, 1851; all-important contribution of, 1852-3; their success at St. Mihiel, 1877.
- AMET, ADMIRAL, attempts to associate himself with Calthorpe in Turkish armistice negotiations, 1976.
- AMIENS, French suggest concentration at, instead of at Maubeuge, 50; Germans in, 52; offensive of 8/8/18, a striking success, 1869; offensive of 8/8/18, death-blow to German hopes, 1870.
- AMIENS, Peace of, 1218-9.
- "AMIRAL AUBE," dispatched to Murmansk, 1893.
- ANDERSON, SIR KENNETH, shipping control and, 727.
- ANDERSON, W. C., on Churchill's work as Minister of Munitions, 1160.
- ANGLO-AMERICAN ARBITRATION TREATY, 59.
- ANGLO-PERSIAN OIL COMPANY, Mesopotamia campaign and, 480-1; defence of their pipelines, 1075.
- ANTHOINE, GENERAL, co-operates with British in Flanders, 1266, 1614.
- ANTWERP, Sir John French proposes landing at, 50-1; part played by machines in capture of, 366.
- ANZACS, War record of, 2008-9. [*See also under* Australia.]
- AOSTA, Duke of, 1396; a fine soldier, 1397; his qualities, 1399.
- APPONIYI, COUNT, Roumania and, 1484.
- ARABI PASHA, 1080.
- ARABIA, future of, 1506.
- "ARABIC," sinking of, 402-3.
- ARABS, support British against Turks, 1075.
- ARCHANGEL, Allied occupation of, 1894.
- ARMAMENT FIRMS, accept orders they are unable to execute, 82-3; Cabinet Committee on Munitions and, 89; protest against peace in Austria and Germany, 1499.
- ARMAMENT INDUSTRIES, Lloyd George in favour of nationalising, 1596.
- ARMAMENTS OUTPUT COMMITTEE, constituted, 111; Ministry of Munitions and, 163.
- ARMENIA, future of, 1506.
- ARMISTICE, German signing of, 1884, 1981-2; its main conditions, 1982; Germans protest against terms of, 1984; modification in terms of, 1985; Parliament gives thanks for, 1986; terms of, 2044-53. [*See also under* Peace.]
- ARMSTRONG, MESSRS., Sir Percy Girouard leaves, 152.

BRAS, BATTLE OF, Ludendorff on, 902-3; success of attributable to surprise, 1301.

ARTHUR, SIR GEORGE, 227.

ARTILLERY, HEAVY, British Army's deficiency in, 76-7.

ATOIS, futile massacres at, 1259.

ATOIS AND CHAMPAGNE, offensives of 1915 in, 1655.

BZ, GENERAL VON, on Austrian food shortage, 1472, 1890; confident of victory over Italians, 1928.

BHMORE, GENERAL, in command of Air Defences of London, 1106-7.

BKWITH, SIR G., 102, 104.

ASQUITH, HERBERT HENRY (EARL OF OXFORD AND ASQUITH), Foreign policy of, 3-4; becomes Prime Minister, 4; approves Lloyd George's proposals for party truce in 1910, 21-2; Agadir incident and, 26; Foreign policy of, 28; Anglo-French relations and, 30; 39, 41, 45; Committee of Imperial Defence and, 48; 49-50; Lloyd George's criticisms of, 55; owed his position solely to his own abilities, 56; "least contentious of politicians," 57; Italy and, 59; 63, 102; Balfour and, 102; Labour troubles and, 104; on Munitions of War Committee, 107-8; delivers Newcastle speech on munitions, 116-7; Lloyd George's letter to (19/5/15) on shell shortage, 121-2; 127; Unionist support for, in 1914, 129, 130; Kitchener and, 130; Fisher's resignation and, 134-6; agrees to formation of Coalition, 136; formation of Coalition and, 136 *et seq.*; saves M'Kenna and sacrifices Haldane, 137-8; munitions and, 138; Dardanelles and, 139; Ministry of Munitions and, 142; thanks Lloyd George for loyalty, 144-5; Theodore Roosevelt and, 145-6; Amalgamated Society of Engineers and, 188-9; Lloyd George's letter of 31/12/14, on the necessity for a more vigorous prosecution of the War, 212-3; Dardanelles plan and, 235; Salonika and, 244; Balkans and, 245, 247; Cabinet's ignorance of course of War and, 249; Dardanelles and, 249-50; Balkans and, 256; Lloyd George's letter to, on Russian situation, 264-5; forbids War Office to suppress unpalatable news from Russia, 272; offensive of September, 1915, and, 290; Balkans and, 305; proposes formation of new War Committee, 307-8; Lloyd George replies to his proposals of 28/10/15, 308-10; arranges for Kitchener to go East, 311; decides to take over the War Office, 311; goes to Calais to discuss Salonika evacuation, 315; Lloyd George's "Big Gun Programme" and, 335; Lloyd George's letter to, on control of design, 376; supports Lloyd George on control of design, 377; hands over Ordnance Board to Lloyd George, 377-8; Du Cane's position and, 378-9; tanks and, 382; Colonel House's peace proposals and, 411; visits Ireland after 1916 Insurrection, 418; proposes that Lloyd George should visit Ireland, 420; announces features of Irish Settlement (1916) in House of Commons, 424; appoints Duke Chief Secretary in Ireland, 424; recruiting and, 429; his pledges to married men on conscription,

435; lays Military Service Bill before Parliament, 436; Cabinet dissensions on conscription and, 438; introduces universal military service, 439; Lloyd George's relations with, 441; some party members impatient of, 445; attempts made to estrange Lloyd George and, 446 *et seq.*; help given him by Illingworth, 448; absolutely free from party pettiness in War, 449; Kitchener and, 456; offers Lloyd George the Secretaryship of State for War, 456-7; persuades Lloyd George to take over War Office, 460; Lloyd George writes to, on Russian question, 461-3; proposed Russian visit of Robertson and, 463; on Robertson, 467; asks Robertson to formulate peace proposals, 497; asks members of War Committee to express their views on peace proposals, 514-5; peace terms and, 519-20; asks for soldiers' opinions on Lansdowne memorandum, 521; decides against a peace move, 531; his speech urging against premature peace, 531-2; was right to reject Lansdowne proposals, 534; discusses situation in November, 1916, with Lloyd George, 539; to represent Britain at Paris Conference, 542; revises Lloyd George's Paris Conference memorandum, 544 *et seq.*; goes to Paris, 555; discusses situation with Briand (November, 1916), 555-7; lacks driving-power, 556; urges a Russian Conference at Paris, 560; explains respect felt for Venizelos in England, at Paris Conference, 565; on Balkan transport problems, 570-1; promises to examine Italian finances, 571; tired by two and a half years of War, 575; not prepared to order Robertson to go to Russia, 582; food shortage and, 584; attitudes of Law and Carson to, 585-6; Tory ministers devoted to, 586; receives Lloyd George's War Committee suggestions, 587; replies to Lloyd George's proposals for War Committee of three, 587-8; arrives at agreement with Lloyd George on War Committee, 589; his letter of 4/12/16 protesting against *Times* leader, 590; refuses to see Lloyd George, 591; calls meeting of Liberal leaders but excludes Lloyd George, 591; letter of 4/12/16, announcing resignation of Government, 591-2; letter of 5/12/16, 594-5; requests Lloyd George to refrain from publishing recent correspondence, 595; letter of 5/12/16 announcing his resignation of Premiership, 595; refuses to serve under either Balfour or Law, 595-6; Lloyd George's desire to remove Balfour from Admiralty and, 596; his one-sided statement of facts of December Crisis (1916), 599; possessed the temperament of a judge, 601; his non-constructive mind, 601; his limitations as War leader, 602-3; Carson critical of, 608; anxious to be at home in elevated society, 611; Law and, 611-2; on Law, 613; half of Liberals still follow, 621; 622, 623; invites Henderson to oppose Lloyd George, 625; 626, 633; co-operation of would have been very useful, 635; 640; 643; his decision against an inconclusive peace, 652; on German peace note, 659; neglects to take drastic measures to save shipping, 725-6; on co-ordination at



Paris Conference, 819; his view of Russian Revolution, 970; Colonel House and, 993; W. M. Hughes and, 1034; sets up War Air Committee, 1097; decides to create Air Board, 1098; Air Board dispute and, 1100-1; Henderson and, 1140; his Reconstruction Committee (1916), 1160; Electoral Reform and, 1169; moves resolution that legislation be enacted on lines laid down by Speaker's Conference on Electoral Reform, withdrawing his opposition to Women's Suffrage, 1171-2; challenges Michaelis's peace speech, 1213; German peace terms and, 1214-5; his draft letter of 21/11/16 on the question of military advance along Flemish coast, 1251-2; did not give instructions for Passchendaele, 1255; his opinion of Robertson, 1367; leads attack on idea of Inter-Allied Council, 1441; Lloyd George's reply to, on Inter-Allied Council, 1445; defends actions of High Commands, 1446; raises question of naval representation on Inter-Allied Council, 1446; regards Inter-Allied Council as superfluous, 1448; refrains from attempting to attack main principles of Inter-Allied Council, 1448; Ludendorff hopes he will be in power, 1476; 1485; approves of Lloyd George's peace aims, 1492; 1510; opposes Irish conscription, 1600; *Globe* appeals to, about General Reserve, 1671; to attack Government on General Reserve question, 1677; attacks Lloyd George on General Reserve and similar questions, 1680-3; eulogises Haig and Robertson, 1680; hates Sir Henry Wilson, 1688; accepts Lloyd George's defence of Versailles arrangements concerning Robertson and General Reserve, 1694; the rout of his followers in 1918 due partly to Maurice intrigue, 1786; demands Select Committee inquiry into Maurice's allegations, 1787 *et seq.*; condones Maurice's breach of discipline, 1791; on Austrian peace note of September, 1918, 1941; on Armistice, 1986; educational reforms and, 1994; his dealings with military leaders, 2014; Lord French's dismissal and, 2031; his Government and Champagne offensive, 2035; Somme offensive and, 2036.

ASQUITH, RAYMOND, death of, 323, 532, 603.

ATTRITION, military principle of, 551; High Command's belief in, 617; Robertson favours policy of, 1288.

AUCHINCLOSS, GORDON, 1796.

AUSTRALIA, did not introduce conscription, 2006; War record of, 2008-9; usefulness of her Navy, 2010.

AUSTRIA, makes peace overtures which are wrecked on rock of Italian-French dissensions, 1175-1204; effect of defeat of, 1284 *et seq.*; war-weariness in, 1477; refuses to make separate peace, 1479; sues for peace, 1879; starvation in, 1889-90; under Germany's thumb, 1933; resolves to act independently of Germany, 1935.

AUSTRIAN FRONT, weakness of due to racial differences, 217; an attack on proposed as alternative to Passchendaele, 1301-2.

AVIATION, strides made in during War, 1095 *et seq.* [See also under Aeroplanes and Air.]

BACON (American politician), more interested in success for the Allies than in internal questions, 414.

BACON, ADMIRAL, replaced by Keyes at Dover, 701.

BAGHDAD, advance on, 482; cause of failure to capture, 487; capture of, 1078-9; effect of fall of, 1454-5.

BAIN, D., at Ministry of Munitions, 163.

BAIRD, MAJOR, appointed to Air Board, 1098-9.

BAKER, HAROLD, to represent Kitchener on munitions of War Committee, 110; originally in War Office, 112.

BAKER, J. ALLEN, letter on American attitude to War, 992.

BAKER, N. D., on how best to use American troops, 1804; problem of hastening arrival of American troops and, 1811-2 *et seq.*; President Wilson wishes to consult him about Pershing, 1820; Lloyd George's arguments for immediate use of American troops and, 1821-2.

BAKER-CARR, GENERAL, on official indifference to importance of machine-guns, 357-9; politicians' responsibility for Passchendaele and, 1249; his description of Flanders mud, 1306-7.

BAKHNETIEFF, the Russian, Northcliffe has conference with, 1007.

BAKU, British occupation of, 1909.

BALANCE OF POWER, Robertson of the opinion that a strong Central European Power is essential for maintenance of, 499.

BALDWIN, STANLEY (later Earl Baldwin of Bewdley), on partnership between Lloyd George and Bonar Law, 609; takes office as Junior Lord of the Treasury, 642.

BALFOUR, A. J. (later Earl of Balfour), approves idea of party truce (1910), 22-3; Committee of Imperial Defence and, 48; 60; Lloyd George's correspondence with on munitions, 102 *et seq.*; on War Office limitations, 103; on Kitchener's incapacity to visualise munitions problem, 108-9; Montagu's memorandum and, 109-10; on War Office's Obstruction of Munitions Committee, 111; his memorandum on field-guns, 112; sees deputation from G.H.Q. on ammunition shortage, 119; disinterestedness of, 130-1; 170-1; Dardanelles plan and, 235; central control of strategy and, 240; visits Calais about Salonika evacuation, 315; on Somme offensive, 322; scientific research in relation to war and, 368; tank research and, 370; responsibility for tank supply and, 383; at Hatfield tank trial, 383; House's peace proposals and, 411; describes M'Kenna as an adroit accountant, 447; Kitchener and, 456; peace proposals of, 515; his memorandum on peace settlement, 543-9; situation in November, 1916, and, 539; challenges Curzon on aeroplane issue, 583; Asquith insists on retaining, 592; Asquith turns down suggestion that he should form Government, 596; accepts office under Lloyd George loyally supporting him thereafter, 596-7; Asquith's refusal to serve

under, 599; his skill in dealing with Irish Nationalists, 604; his struggle with Lloyd George over Education Bill of 1902, 604-5; his weakness displayed in Tariff Reform controversy, 605; his services to his country after retirement, 605; his impartiality and courage, 606-7; capacity for bold decision displayed in Irish work of, 606; Clemenceau and, 606; irresolute at Admiralty but a good Foreign Secretary, 607; a member of the ruling class, 611; becomes Foreign Secretary, 621; his influence among Tories, 622; 624; first War Cabinet and, 634; Asquith's refusal to serve under, 635; Wilson's peace note and, 660, 661, 663-4; shipping and, 735; on revolutionary character of decisions regarding food control, 764; Italian food shortage and, 798; Petrograd Conference and, 928; 950; invites Czar to take refuge in England, 973; House's message to, 992-3; to head mission to America, 994; his personal success in U.S.A., 997-8; President Wilson and, 999; visits Canada, 1000; approves of appointment of Northcliffe as head of mission to America, 1000-1; Northcliffe and, 1002, 1005; Wilson and, 1011-2; 1012, 1019, 1026; attends Imperial War Cabinet, 1036; opposes Curzon's Air Board suggestions, 1098; his duel with Curzon over Air Board, 1099; 1126; 1133; Stockholm Conference and, 1126; 1133-4; Henderson and, 1138-9; Vatican peace note and, 1217-8; text of his memorandum on Kuhlmann peace move, 1237-40; learns that Lancken had approached the French, 1241; confident Kuhlmann's appeal is genuine, 1241; supports Haig's Passchendaele plans, 1293; discusses Austrian peace terms with Smuts, 1478; his memorandum of *December, 1917*, on Russian situation, 1544-7; on British attitude to Bolsheviks, 1552-3; his despatch to Bruce Lockhart, 1555-7; at Paris Conference of 29/11/17, 1617; attempts to induce Robertson to see reason, 1685-6; dislikes Sir Henry Wilson, 1689; problem of hastening arrival of American troops and, 1812; appeals to President Wilson after troop-transport plans have been wrecked by Pershing, 1819-20; 1844, 1853; less pessimistic than Sir Henry Wilson and Smuts (*July, 1918*), 1866; his despatch to U.S.A. on Japanese intervention in Russia, 1898-9; his note on British attitude to Russia, 1906-7; voices British feeling concerning Austrian peace note of *September, 1918*, 1941; Armistice terms and, 1971-2; supports Lloyd George against Clemenceau in matter of Turkish armistice, 1977.

**ALFOUR DECLARATION ON PALESTINE**, origin of, 349; capture of Jerusalem and, 1092.

**ALFOUR OF BURLEIGH, BARON**, denounces Irish settlement, 422; Imperial War Cabinet and, 1060.

**ALFOURIER, GENERAL MAURICE**, Lloyd George's meeting with, 94-5.

**ALKANS**, Grey's settlement of 1913, 59; potentialities of, from Allied point of view, 217-8; War Council and, 231 *et seq.*; advantages to Germany of success in, 299-

301; resources of, neglected by Allies, 308-9; collapse in, suits Westerners, 317; complete failure of Allied cause in, 325-6; possibilities of, in *October, 1916*, 554; Briand on possibilities in, 559; universal agreement on paramount importance of at Paris Conference, 561-2; decisions of Chantilly Conference in regard to, 567; Italian engineers to make roads in, 570-1; Briand and, 572; military chiefs ignore views of Government on, 573; lost opportunities in, 574; German ideas of Allied efforts in, 553; the outlook in 1917, 818 *et seq.*; Lloyd George on situation at Rome Conference, 840-1; Rome Conference conclusions concerning, 856-7; Smuts on position in (*April, 1917*), 911-2; offensive in essential, 1265; War Cabinet kept in ignorance of course of events in, 1472; Sir Henry Wilson sees no hope in (*July, 1918*), 1863-4; Allied stupidity about, 1911-2; neglect of Army in, 1914-5; Clemenceau in favour of offensive in, 1917; Lloyd George approves offensive in, 1919; Allies victorious in, 1919-20; plans for operations in (*October, 1918*), 1950-1; Allied neglect of, 1999. [*See also Salonika and Dardanelles.*]

**BALLARD, GENERAL**, admits the difficulties attendant upon support of Kaledin, 1542.

**BANBURY, SIR FREDERICK** (now Lord), attacks Corn Production Bill, 766-7.

**BANKS**, effects of 1914 crisis on, 62 *et seq.*

**BARK, M.**, Russian Finance Minister, financing of Russian contracts in America and, 69, 241; supports Salonika offensive plan, 243; Anglo-Russian relations and, 462.

**BARKER, SIR W. R.**, educational reform and, 1994.

**BARLOW, SIR THOMAS**, health of munition workers and, 206.

**BARNES, GEORGE**, becomes Minister of Pensions, 642; MacDonald's projected Russian visit and, 1125; Henderson and, 1129; submits reports of Commissioners on Industrial Unrest, 1156-9; on Man-power Committee, 1576; chairman of conference between Government and Labour, 1593.

**BARRÈRE, M.**, at Rome Conference, 848, 1199.

**BARRETT, GENERAL**, river transport shortage and, 485.

**BASRA**, capture of, 481; mismanagement at, 487-8.

**BATHURST, CAPTAIN** (later Lord Bledisloe), at War Cabinet session on food question, 761; on advantages of paying fair wages to agricultural labourers, 764.

**BATTENBERG, PRINCE LOUIS OF**, 50.

**BAUER, GUSTAV**, Michaelis and, 1229.

**BAYLEY, CLIVE**, Northcliffe and, 1004.

**BEACH, SIR MICHAEL HICKS** (later Lord St. Aldwyn), financial crisis (*1914*) and, 64-5; Kitchener and, 114; 1328.

**BEARDMORE, MESSRS.**, Lloyd George visits works of, 187.

**BEATTY, ADMIRAL, EARL**, on submarine warfare, 673; his standing in Navy, 684; in favour of convoys, 689, 690; his following in Navy, 696; antagonism between Jellicoe and, 700; 1773, 2043.



- BEAUMONT HAMEL**, strength of German fortifications at, 282.
- BEAUVAIS AGREEMENT**, Italian Army and, 1775-7.
- BEAUVAIS CONFERENCE**, 1743 *et seq.*
- BEAVERBROOK, LORD**, urges Lloyd George not to resign, 460; asked to arrange meeting between Bonar Law and Lloyd George, 575; his account of negotiations of Lloyd George with Carson and Law, 586; Law's interviews with Tory leaders and, 589; *Times* leader of 4/12/16 and, 590; account of formation of Lloyd George's Government given by, 597; his friendship for Law, 613; 623; 1002; deserving of credit for his War-time propaganda, 1873.
- BECK, C.**, on cost of National Service Ministry, 812.
- BECK, SIR RAYMOND**, War Risks Insurance and, 721.
- BEER RESTRICTION ACT, OUTPUT OF**, restrictions under, 791-2.
- BEHARRELL, SIR GEORGE**, transport problems and, 473, 476.
- BELGIUM**, our liabilities contingent on violation of, 30-1; the crucial issue of the War, 43 *et seq.*; American attitude to, 395-6, 399; Bernstorff and, 413; Robertson and, 499; Asquith Government and, 532-3; 662, 665, 1049; Austrian peace move and, 1178-9; Lloyd George on, 1212; Germany insists on controlling, in *July*, 1918, 1932.
- BELL, SIR HUGH**, on Sir Edward Grey, 58-9.
- BENAZET, M.**, King Constantine's suggestions to, 565.
- BENEDICTUS XVI, POPE**, his peace note of 16/8/17, 1215-17; Wilson's reply to, 1220-1222; 1231; his appeal on behalf of Austria-Hungary, 1977-8. [See also under Catholic Church and Vatican.]
- BENNETT, ARNOLD** false statements published by, 1778.
- BENSON, REAR-ADMIRAL W. S.**, his Anglo-phobia, 996; 1795; U.S.A.'s contribution to War and, 1800.
- BERCHTOLD, COUNT**, mainly responsible for War, 34; limitations of, 35; did not realise what result of his actions in *July*, 1914, would be, 1995.
- BERESFORD, LORD CHARLES**, writes to Lloyd George on conduct of the War, 464; Russia and, 312-4.
- BERNSTEIN, HENRI**, 90.
- BERNSTORFF, COUNT JOHANN**, communicates Germany's peace terms to U.S.A., 413; his letter to House on Wilson's peace note, 664-666; in favour of Wilson's presidency, 978; announces unrestricted submarine warfare, 982; writes privately to House concerning Germany's peace terms, 983; 985; 1005; Sanders reports on Turkish situation to, 1924-5.
- BERTHELOT, PHILIPPE**, peace notes of *December*, 1916, and, 660; at Rome Conference, 838.
- BERTIE, SIR FRANCIS** (later Lord), Balkans and, 242-3; at Paris Conference, 556; does not want Czar to come to England, 975.
- BETHMANN-HOLLWEG, THEOBALD VON**, Lloyd George meets, 17-9; his view of English decadence, 18-9; Agadir incident and, 25; limitations of, 35; rejects idea of conference in *July*, 1914, 36; Colonel House and, 407; President Wilson and, 511-12; dismissed for lack of enthusiasm, 1208-9; 1231; his efforts to negotiate peace frustrated by German Military Chiefs, 1669; dismissal of, 1931; franchise reforms and, 1940.
- BEVERIDGE, SIR WILLIAM**, at Ministry of Munitions, 151-63.
- BEVIN, ERNEST**, meets Lloyd George, 625.
- BIDDULPH, BRIGADIER-GENERAL**, Fifth Army defences in *March*, 1918, and, 1704.
- BIKANIR, MAHARAJAH OF**, invited to attend Imperial War Cabinet, 1028-9; capacity of, 1034; 2010.
- BILLING, PEMBERTON**, returned to Parliament, 1097.
- BINGLEY, GENERAL**, reports on medical resources failure in Mesopotamia, 488.
- BIRKENHEAD, EARL OF**, approves idea of Party truce (1910), 22; 28.
- BIRMINGHAM SMALL ARMS CO.**, machine-gun contracts and, 363.
- BIRRELL, AUGUSTINE**, refuses to take drastic action against Sinn Fein, 417; resigns Irish Chief Secretaryship, 418.
- BISMARCK, PRINCE**, on the dangers of an English invasion, 10-1; 35; stupidity of German statesmen since dismissal of, 991; 1606, 2003.
- BISSOLATI-BERGAMASCHI, LEONIDA**, protests against Cadorna's refusal to accept British offer of guns, 1372-3; 1403.
- BLACK, SIR FREDERICK**, Munitions of War Committee and, 108; originally at Admiralty, 112; at Ministry of Munitions, 168.
- BLACKETT, SIR BASIL**, American loans and, 1018.
- BLACK LABOUR**, employment of, 631.
- BLERIOT, LOUIS**, 1905.
- BLISS, GENERAL T. H.**, to attend Inter-Allied Council, 1446; his estimates of America's man-power, 1578; at Paris Conference of 20/11/17, 1617; at Supreme Council meeting of 30/1/18, 1635; cognisant of nature of General Reserve, 1639; assured of President Wilson's approval of Foch as President of General Reserve, 1641; 1712; in favour of General Reserve, 1720; his verdict on Doullens Agreement, 1740-1; 1745, 1747; supports Unity of Command, 1748; 1749, 1795; member of Supreme War Council, 1796; position with regard to American troops and, 1808-9; agrees to British policy concerning American Army, 1813; Pershing and, 1824; does not support Pershing, 1825.
- BLOCKADE, BRITISH, U.S.A.** annoyed by, 396-7; strangling Germany, 667-8; effect of in Germany, 712; 1450; Germany's protest against continuance of, after Armistice, 1983-4.
- BOARD OF TRADE**, Lloyd George leaves, 4.



GER WAR, a sign of English degeneracy, 19; 75, 1562; experience of no use in Great War, 2038.

OLSHEVIKS, hardly concerned in February Revolution, 953; rising of 16/7/17, 1532; question of British attitude towards, 1540; Balfour's ideas on their aims, 1545-6; British attitude to, in *January, 1918*, 1552-3; insecurity of, in 1917, 1885-6; Allied attitude towards, 1888-9; antipathetic to both Allies and Germany, 1892; refuse to co-operate with Allies to prevent German penetration of Russia, 1903-4; Kerensky seeks Allied aid against, 1904-6; active in Germany, 1981. [See also Bolshevism, Lenin and Russia.]

OLSHEVISM, conquers Russia, 1518 *et seq.*; Lloyd George has no fear of, 1554-5; permeating German armies, 1872-3; progress of, in Russia, 1885 *et seq.*; Allies not concerned to destroy, 1901; Germany on verge of, 1983. [See also preceding entry.]

OUTH, SIR G. M., Balfour and Lloyd George to interview on munitions question, 109; to represent Kitchener on Munitions of War Committee, 110; helps to form Armaments Output Committee, 111, 112; at Ministry of Munitions, 151; head of Armaments Output Committee, 163.

ORDEN, SIR ROBERT, does not allow Party politics to interfere with prosecution of War, 1023; character of, 1032; attends Imperial War Cabinet, 1036; on maintenance of peace, 1039; on disarmament, 1041; on Imperial transport, 1042; 1043; 2010.

OSELLI, PAOLO (Italian Premier), Karl's peace overtures and, 1185.

OTHA, GENERAL, his loyalty to the Empire, 1024; 2010.

OUILLO, FRANKLIN, visits Italy, 1395; Inter-Allied Council and, 1438-9; character of, 1602-3.

OULANGER, GENERAL, 450, 1717.

OULOGNE, CONFERENCE ON MUNITIONS AT (JUNE, 1915), German superiority in heavy artillery apparent at, 290; howitzers discussed at, 322; proceedings of, 329 *et seq.*; questions put by Lloyd George to Du Cane at, 329; co-ordination of munitions production at, 330; artillery problems at, 330 *et seq.*; results of, 336.

OULOGNE, INTER-ALLIED CONFERENCE OF SEPTEMBER, 1917, at question of extension of British Front and, 1656.

OYCOTT, PROFESSOR, munition workers and, 206.

OY-ED, KARL, German attempt to damage American munition plants and, 403.

RADBURY, SIR JOHN, Financial Crisis in 1914 and, 63; dismal financial views of, 408-9.

RADE, SIR REGINALD, Inventions Department and, 370; memorandum on munition functions of War Office noted by, 377; letter from on design and inspection, 380.

RANDENBURG CORPS, 1725.

BRANTING, KARL, proposes Stockholm Conference, 1119; MacDonald and, 1125; revives idea of Stockholm Conference, 1126.

"BRASS HATS," soldiers' attitude to, 1409.

BREST-LITOVSK, Treaty of, effects of on Western Front, 1389; negotiations for, 1495; Allied view of, 1501; an application of ideas of Central Powers, 1549; negotiations interrupted, 1551; signing of, 1557, 1759; Eastern Europe after, 1885; consequences of Russia's refusal to sign, 1892; becomes scrap-paper, 1908; Germany forced to denounce, 1982. [See also under Russia.]

BREWING INDUSTRY, State-control of, 791-3. [See also under Drink and Liquor.]

BRIAND, ARISTIDE, 90; strategy and, 228; Gallieni and, 228; Balkans and, 242-3, 244; believes in offensive at Salonika, 320; his attitude to House's peace mission, 407-8; English conscription and, 441; Robertson and, 469; Robertson's peace proposals and, 497; delivers speech on impossibility of making peace in 1916, 507-8; his speech a warning to President Wilson, 511; declares the word "peace" to be a sacrilege, 520; Paris Conference and, 543-4; receives memorandum by Lloyd George on situation in November, 1916, 544; discusses situation with Asquith, 555-6; easy-going habits of, 556; his opening speech at Paris Conference, 557-60; urges that Allied resources should be pooled, 564-5; on situation in Greece, 565-6; on Salonika, 570-71; Italy's finances and, 571; the weakness of his opening speech at Paris Conference, 572; points out danger of exhaustion, 585; on German peace note, 655; prepares reply to German note, 658; replies to American peace note, 660; not present at Inter-Allied Conference of December, 1916, 660; on co-ordination, 819; trying to save Joffre, 823; at Rome Conference, 838; asks British to send two divisions to Salonika, 847-8; prefers Nivelle plan to Italian offensive, 851; his high opinion of Nivelle, 852; on poor quality of German troops, 852; Cadorna and, 852; changes his tactics in supporting Nivelle plan, 859; his change of mind due to French jealousy of Italy, 865; tries to shield Joffre, 868; converted to supporting Nivelle plan, 877; his position insecure, 880; at Calais Conference, 892; his reactions to Robertson's disapproval of Nivelle, 895; pooling of Allied resources and, 933; orders French Ambassador to present a statement in writing to Russian Government on French annexations, 948; Austria's peace overtures and, 1181; resignation of, 1184; Kuhlmann peace move and, 1241, 1242; misled as to Kuhlmann's peace terms, 1244; at Rome Conference, 1259; talks magnificently, but fails to act, 1406; a supporter of Nivelle, 1407; 1602; Clemenceau despises, 1603; oratory of, 1617; Unity of Command and, 1750.

BRIDGEMAN, WILLIAM CLIVE (later Lord), on working of National Service Bill, 8ro.

BRIDGES, MAJOR-GENERAL G. T. M., member of American Mission, 997.

BRIGHT, JOHN, 131; 444; his American sympathies, 999.

- BRITISH EMPIRE**, value and limits of Imperial consultation during War, 1025; the backbone of the Alliance, 1054; contributions of its various parts to War, 2004-10; range and variety of, 2004-5.
- BRITISH RED CROSS SOCIETY**, Nixon refuses help of, 491.
- BRIZON, M.**, demands peace in *September, 1916*, 507-8.
- BROCKDORFF-RANTZAU, COUNT U. K. C. VON**, Clemenceau and, 1605.
- BROODSEINDE, The Times** manufactures victory at, 1339.
- BROWN, MR.**, at Ministry of Munitions, 163.
- BROWNING, ADMIRAL**, his work in procuring naval co-operation, 996-7.
- BROWNLIE, MR.**, 189.
- BRUCE, W. N.**, educational reform and, 994.
- BRUNYATE, MR.**, Financial Secretary to Indian Government, 493-5.
- BRUSSIOFF, GENERAL**, Lansdowne on, 518; his offensives not decisive, 558; his offensive of 1916, 558; value of surprise in his 1916 offensive, 833; in plot to depose Czar, 958; 1410; his successful offensive of *July, 1917*, 1525-6; dismissal of, 1536; a politician, 1538; his victories not much noticed, 1911.
- BRUYERE, M.**, on Aisne offensive, 904-5.
- BRYAN, J. W.**, assures Austrian Ambassador that America does not intend to fight, 401; letter to, from Page in Rome, 405.
- BRYCE, LORD**, 415.
- BUCHAN, JOHN** (later Lord Tweedsmuir), his fictional account of Lloyd George's attitude to Nivelles offensive, 886-7; his *History of the War* quoted, 1329, 1330.
- BUCHANAN, SIR GEORGE**, put in command at Basra but is unable to make any headway, 487-8.
- BUCHANAN, SIR GEORGE W.**, British Ambassador in Petrograd, rumours of separate Russian peace in 1916 and, 464; at Petrograd Conference, 931; announces Czar's desire to dissolve Duma, 941; his candid words to Czar, 946-7; abstains from dangerous topics in presence of the Czar, 949; his optimism, 950; advises British Government to recognise Provisional Government in Russia, 969; on how the Russian revolutionaries received congratulatory messages from Law and Lloyd George, 971; his attempts to secure the safety of the Czar and his family, 972-6; his report of 15/3/17 on Russian situation, 1117-8; British Labour deputation to Russia and, 1118; suggestion to replace him by someone with Socialist leanings, 1121-2; Henderson unable to replace, 1122-3; in favour of permitting MacDonald to visit Russia, 1124; on Russian situation in *August, 1917*, 1131; his telegram of 30/4/17 from Petrograd, 1519-20; his report of 15/6/17, 1523-4; his account of position in *July, 1917*, 1532-4; advises British Government to set Russia free from her obligations, 1541-2; his views about Russia put before Allies in Paris, 1543; question of assuring his safety, 1545-6; advises release of Chicherin and Petroff, 1548-9; proposal to send him on leave, 1550; against open rupture with Bolsheviks, 1553.
- BUCHAREST**, fall of, 626; Treaty of, Germany forced to denounce, 1982.
- BUELOW, PRINCE VON**, reprimands Metternich, 17; sent to Italy, 256; Austro-Italian disputes and, 1188.
- BUGNET'S Foch Talks** quoted, 2025.
- BULGARIA**, uncertainty about, 217-8, 237-40, 244; joins Central Powers, 246; 255, 293-4; attacks Serbia, 297; seeks an armistice, 1879; collapse of, means end of German hopes, 1911; signs armistice, 1920; effects of collapse of, 1920, 1944.
- BULLECOURT**, attacks on, 903-4.
- BURIAN, COUNT**, issues first Austrian peace note, 1879; announces Austria's intention of ending the War, 1936; his peace note a cry of despair, 1943-4.
- BURKE, EDMUND**, 225.
- BURN, COLONEL**, Maurice debate and, 1785.
- BURNHAM, LORD**, educational reform and, 1991.
- BURNS, JOHN**, his attitude to Belgian neutrality question, 43; opposed to War, 444.
- BUSACO, BATTLE OF**, 1760.
- BUTLER, GENERAL**, sent by Haig to coax Geddes to France, 474; his promotion an error, 1725.
- BUTT, SIR ALFRED**, his rationing scheme, 788; operation of his rationing scheme, 795.
- BYLAEFF, M.**, Anglo-Persian relations and, 462.
- BYNG, GENERAL**, his objections to Fuller's tank plans, 1335; bungles Cambrai attack, 1335; not called at Cambrai inquiry, 1339; his bungling of Third Army strategy in *March, 1918*, 1735-6; 1738, 2028.
- BYRNE, GENERAL**, on Irish conscription question, 1598.
- CABINET COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL RESOURCES**, points out inadequacy of voluntary recruiting, 431.
- CABINET SECRETARIAT**, institution of, 643.
- CABINET WAR COMMITTEE**, disagreement between Ministry of Munitions and War Office discussed by, 380-1; discusses Passchendaele, 1272 *et seq.*
- CADORNA, GENERAL**, his artillery inadequate, 647; at Rome Conference, 838; co-ordination and, 841; guns for Italian offensive and, 845; refuses to supply engineers for Balkan transport, 849; Lloyd George's proposals for an Italian offensive and, 850; his opinion of proposals, 853-5; unenthusiastic about Lloyd George's offer of guns for Italian Front, 854-5; his lukewarmness fatal to Lloyd George's plans, 858; his lack of enthusiasm due to fact that he had already promised Robertson and Lyautey to commit himself to different strategy, 859;

- hidden motives at work at Rome Conference and, 860 *et seq.*; his case analogous with those of Nivelle, Falkenhayn and Hoetzendorff, 863-4; Robertson's contempt for, 865, 866; his timidity the cause of hopeless position on Italian Front, 874; makes any alternative to Nivelle plan impossible, 877; fears demoralisation of Italian Army, 1189; Italian peace offer and, 1195; his failure on the Isonzo, 1202; Ribot and, 1203; apprehensive as to effect of peace propaganda among his troops, 1206; supported by Foch, 1287; 1304; urges attack on Turkey, 1331; 1332; his refusal of British offer of guns, 1372; asks for twenty divisions, 1373; plans offensive, 1374; not in need of men but of munitions, 1374-5; asks for heavy guns, 1376-7; his message of 16/7/17 to Foch, 1378; Foch's view of his request, 1378-9; abandons plan for Italian offensive, 1379; his ardour cooled by Robertson, 1380; forced to abandon attack because of ammunition shortage, 1385, 1386; postpones offensive, 1387; his note of 29/8/17 to Robertson, 1387-8; unequal to calls of great emergency, 1391; an able soldier, 1392; Allied Generals visit, 1395; 1396; dismissal of, 1397; Italian King agrees to his supersession, 1402-3; British and French Generals jealous of, 1406-7; prefers rather to honour Chantilly bond than to save Italy, 1407; 1409; appointed permanent Italian representative on Inter-Allied Council, 1440; 1443-4; on ability of Germans to support attack on Italy, 1462; Russian position and, 1531; 1617; against idea of Generalissimo, 1629; cognisant of nature of General Reserve, 1639-40; Supreme War Council meeting of 21/1/18 and, 1694, 1712-3.
- CAILLAUX, J. P. M. A.**, 90; a possible successor to Briand, 880; charged with high treason, 1662.
- CALAIS CONFERENCE (OF DECEMBER, 1915)**, Salonika evacuation decision at, 314-6.
- CALAIS CONFERENCE (OF FEBRUARY, 1917)**, on Army Transport, 891 *et seq.*; terms of agreement, 893-4.
- CALLWELL, GENERAL SIR C. E.**, suggestion he should go to Russia instead of Robertson, 463; says Sir Henry Wilson doubted wisdom of Haig's Passchendaele plans, 1266; 1685.
- CAMBEFORT, CAPTAIN**, munitions and, 91.
- CAMBON, JULES**, on German peace note, 655; Karl's peace overtures and, 1184; 1185-6; interviews Sixte, 1190; accuses Lloyd George of being an impetuous Celt, 1195; an exceptionally able diplomat, 1200-1; his suspicions of Italy, 1201; his interview with Sixte, 1202.
- CAMBON, PAUL**, on British "honour," 30; Grey and, 40; prepares Allied reply to German peace note, 660; Anglo-French Conference of 28/5/17 and, 1199; his suspicions of Italy, 1200; manœuvres Sixte *pour parler* into futility, 1201; Kuhlmann peace moves and, 1241; convinced that "round-table discussions" would make the continuance of War impossible, 1244.
- CAMBRAI, BATTLE OF**, triumph of tanks at, 386; 1092; 1334-41; secrecy about defeat at, 1337; Cabinet orders inquiry into, 1338; practical results of, 1456, 1874.
- CAMMELL LAIRD, MESSRS.**, refuse commission for erection and management of Nottingham factory, 340.
- CAMPBELL, SIR JAMES** (later Lord Glenavy), his views on conscription in Ireland, 1598-9.
- CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN, SIR HENRY**, his administration divided on foreign policy, 3-4; death of, 4; Anglo-French relations and, 601, 637, 643; Imperial Conferences and, 1029.
- CANADA**, her contribution to the War, 1023, 2007; munitions manufactured in 2009-10.
- CANNING, GEORGE**, 47, 1015.
- CAPITALIST SYSTEM**, in essentials unimpaired by War, 1143-4; attacks upon by I.W.W. and "rank and file movement," 1147-8.
- CAPORETTO, BATTLE OF**, 798; a surprise for the Allied Generals, 831; how it might have been anticipated, 836; France and, 865; helps to quell Labour unrest in Austria, 1162; Italian demoralisation proved at, 1189; Passchendaele plan responsible for disaster of, 1332; 1372-1404; general military position at time of, 1389; results of, 1389 *et seq.*; losses at, 1443; 1619; 1928; destroyed Italian nerve, 1929; may be said to have put Italy out of War, 2001-2.
- CARCANO, SIGNOR**, at Paris Conference of November, 1916, 556, 560.
- CARDWELL, LORD**, 138, 603.
- CARLYLE, THOMAS**, 56, 627.
- CARSO**, British artillery units take part in offensive on, 1376.
- CARSON, SIR EDWARD** (later Lord), his disinterestedness in 1914, 130; on Grey's pledges to Serbia, 294; Salonika and, 297-8; resigns because of "betrayal" of Serbia, 307; on Cabinet's ignorance of military events, 311; at Irish Conference in May, 1916, 420-1; agrees to accept Lloyd George's terms for Irish settlement, 421-2; urges conciliatory attitude on Unionists, 424; Lloyd George's sympathy with, 458; Lloyd George considers his co-operation vital, 585; his view of Asquith, 586; disliked by Tories, 589; Asquith's objection to, 592; advises Law not to recommend Lloyd George for Premiership, 596; supports Lloyd George, 596; Lord R. Cecil on, 607-8; critical of Asquith and Kitchener, 608; opposed to Dardanelles scheme, 608-9; "agin the Government" but his criticism is valuable, 609; ready to serve under Lloyd George, 621; his influence among Tories, 622; not opposed to Churchill, 636; not in War Cabinet, 641; convoy system and, 684-5; his limitations at Admiralty, 696, 699; reasons for his being sent to Admiralty, 699; removed from Admiralty to War Cabinet, 700; arming of merchantmen and, 715-6; Admiralty-Air Board dispute and, 1100-1; his letter denouncing the Speaker's Conference on Electoral Reform, 1169; on Man-power Committee, 1576; views on



- conscription in Ireland, 1598-9; likes Sir Henry Wilson, 1688; Maurice debate and, 1791.
- CARTER, MAJOR**, his description of arrival of wounded at Basra, 490-1; threatened with arrest for telling truth about medical services in Basra, 491.
- CARTER, SIR M. BONHAM**, Kitchener's death and 456, 589, 591.
- CASEMENT, SIR ROGER**, arrest of, 418.
- CASPIAN**, necessity of Allied intervention in, 1908-9.
- CASTLEREAU, GENERAL**, Lloyd George visits his headquarters, 93-4; strategy and, 229; a devout Catholic, 871; to be sent to Petrograd Conference, 929-30; despondency over Russia, 940; his opinion of Russian position in 1917, 953; 1458.
- CASTLEREAGH, LORD**, 47, 230.
- CATHOLIC CHURCH, ROMAN**, higher priesthood never friendly to Allied cause in the War, 1392; Clemenceau's hatred of adherents of, 1717-18.
- CATHOLIC RELIGION, ROMAN**, a complete study of human nature, 630.
- CAVALRY**, Haig's faith in, 1426.
- CAVAN, GENERAL**, Lloyd George visits headquarters of, 322-3; 1263.
- CAVELL, NURSE**, 662, 1241.
- CAWDOR, LORD**, 22.
- CAXTON HALL CONFERENCE**, Lloyd George announces his war aims to Trade Unions at, 1492.
- CECIL, LORD R.**, 92; British blockade and, 397; work done by in organising blockade, 401-2; on situation in 1916, 506-7; his memorandum on peace proposals, 530-1; on disaster of inconclusive peace, 532; on Carson, 607-8; his influence among Tories, 622; 624; at the Foreign Office, 634; receives German peace note, 652; Wilson's peace note and, 660-1; meets Hoover to discuss food co-ordination, 796; on necessity of feeding Italy, 798; 1000; American confiscation of ships built to British order and, 1011-2; views on disarmament at Imperial War Cabinet meeting, 1038; views on League of Nations, 1038-9; views on sanctions, 1039; pessimistic on disarmament question, 1040; Sir E. Crowe's memorandum on his peace schemes (1916), 1062-5; on the desirability of preventing MacDonald from going to Stockholm, 1124-5; 1133, 1199; Russian peace overtures and, 1549-50; dislikes Sir Henry Wilson, 1689; American troop-transport and, 1801; Salonika and, 1918.
- CHAIR, REAR-ADMIRAL SIR DUDLEY DE**, member of American Mission, 997.
- CHAMBERLAIN, SIR AUSTEN**, financial crisis (1914) and, 64; refuses to share responsibility for beer taxes, 72; consents to advance on Kut, 482; authorises attack on Baghdad, 482; his influence among Tories, 622; attends Imperial War Cabinet, 1036; on disarmament, 1041; to take Derby's position on his resignation afterwards withdrawn, 1690; on choice between Manpower and mechanical power, 1876.
- CHAMBERLAIN, JOSEPH**, protectionist proposals of, 605, 637.
- CHAMBERLAIN, NEVILLE**, becomes Director of National Service, 642; Army demand for more men and, 770; appointed in a hurry, 805; his task as Director of National Service, 806 *et seq.*; his memorandum of 19/1/17 on man-power question, 808; makes an appeal for enrolment for National Service, 808-9; his limitations, 811; resigns from Ministry of National Service, 812.
- CHAMPAGNE, BATTLE OF**, Joffre and, 241; 266, 274, 292, 294; futile massacres at, 1259; planning of offensive, 1846; 2035.
- CHANCE AND HUNT, MESSRS.**, explosives and, 342.
- CHANNEL PORTS**, within German reach, 1770.
- CHANTILLY CONFERENCE**, Russians and, 462; Paris Conference to precede, 542; Joffre will not allow Paris Conference to precede, 544; its influence on Russian collapse, 544; proposals of military chiefs at, 566-8; stupidities of 1917 campaign thought out at, 573; sham Balkan offensive scheme outlined at, 818; difficulty of reversing decisions decided upon at, 823-4; Haig and, 1247; bitter legacy of 1452.
- CHAPLIN, LORD**, supports minimum wage policy, 764.
- CHARTERIS, BRIGADIER-GENERAL**, misleads Haig, 1242; fails to inform Cabinet of Pétain's opposition to great offensives, 1265; quoted, 1296, 1306, 1308; "cooks" the reports for Haig, 1315-6; his estimate of quality of German troops, 1317-8; dismissed, 1370; optimistic reports of, 1657.
- CHATEAU-THIERRY**, enemy reaches, 1827.
- CHATHAM, EARL OF**, 47.
- CHELNOKOFF, M. V.**, his interview with Milner, 944-6; lack of fuel and food in Moscow and, 967.
- CHEMIN DES DAMES**, slaughter at causes collapse of French morale, 1453.
- CHETWODE, GENERAL SIR P.** (later Field-Marshal), Palestine campaign and, 1090; in bungled attack on Gaza, 1922-3.
- CHETWYND, LORD**, work done by in production of explosives, 355-6.
- CHICHERIN, G. V.**, release of, demanded by Trotsky, 1540, 1546; released by British, 1548-9.
- CHILSTON, LORD**, kills idea of Party truce in 1910, 23.
- CHINESE AUXILIARY CORPS**, Geddes forms, 478.
- CHKHEIDZE**, in partial control of Duma, 1117.
- CHURCH ARMY**, liquor trade and, 204.
- CHURCHILL, RANDOLPH**, 60.
- CHURCHILL, WINSTON SPENCER**, naval shipbuilding and, 5; approves idea of Party truce (1910), 22; 25, 26, 33; declaration of War and, 48; naval preparations for War and, 49; 50; retreat from Mons and, 51-2; Lloyd George's criticisms of, 55; 88; Fisher and, 133-5; Bonar Law demands resignation of, 136; dismissed from

Admiralty, 139; Dardanelles and, 139-42; strategy and, 227-8; 230; his fight for support for Dardanelles scheme, 231 *et seq.*; wins Kitchener's support for Dardanelles plan, 234; 235, 248; Cabinet ignorance of events of war and, 249; Dardanelles and, 259-60; sets up the Admiralty Landships Committee, 370; work done by in development of tanks, 382 *et seq.*; on Keynes's ideas about finance, 410; a member of the ruling class, 610; one of the three Liberals in public eye, 622; would have been useful in second coalition but Law objected to him, 635-6; takes over Ministry of Munitions, 636; how his enemies regard him, 636-8; control of naval shipbuilding and, 733-4; Ian Hamilton's letter to, on Italian offensive, 866, the absurdity of his beliefs about Czarism, 944; his morbid detestation of the Russian Revolution, 952-4; his work for Naval Air Service, 1096-7; his energetic action on becoming Minister of Munitions, 1159-60; 1752, 1877.

**CIVILIAN AND SOLDIER**, contrast between their conditions, 1142-3.

**CIVILIANS**, assistance given to soldiers by, 2039, 2040; none rises above rank of Brigadier in War, 2040.

**CLARKE, SIR GEORGE (LORD SYDENHAM)**, Committee of Imperial Defence and, 49.

**CLARKE, MR.**, of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, 157.

**CLARKE, TOM**, censored letters on shell shortage and, 126.

**CLEMENTEAU, GEORGES**, naval limitation and, 11; 35, 56, 90; fears for the safety of Paris, 230; opposed to attempts to make peace, 408; claws Briand, 555; Balfour and, 606; a possible successor to Briand, 880; opposed to Flanders offensive—says "Wait for the Americans," 1265; his attitude to Russia in *December, 1917*, 1543; accepts British memorandum of *December, 1917*, on Russian peace terms, 1551; expresses his disgust at Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, 1557-8; Sea-power and, 1564; character of, 1602-9; his hatred of his fellows, 1603; called to power, 1604; his appearance, 1605; his Germanophobia, 1605-6; his courage, 1606; his last defeat, 1607; underestimates importance of sea-power, 1608; Lloyd George's relations with, 1609; becomes Premier, 1616; opens Paris Conference of 29/11/17, 1617; his opening address to War Council at Versailles (1/12/17), 1617-18; in general agreement with Lloyd George on strategy, 1618; supports Salonika expedition, 1620; puts Foch above Pétain, 1629; Italian Front and, 1634; chairman of Supreme Council meeting of 30/1/18, 1635; discussions about General Reserve and, 1637; defines scheme for Inter-Allied Reserve, 1639; approves appointment of Foch as President of General Reserve, 1720; 1721; Milner to Supreme War Council, 1650; impatient at Haig's failure to extend his front, 1660; 1661; Italian reinforcements for Western Front and, 1661; urges further extension of British Front, 1662; 1664; Foch stands up

to, 1674; departs from decisions taken at Versailles, 1696; Haig and, 1713; supporting Pétain on question of General Reserve, 1716; changes his mind about Foch, 1717; his hatred of Foch, as of all Catholics, 1717-18; wants to be Generalissimo, 1718-19; his talk with Haig on subject of Foch, 1719-20; crosses swords with Foch over General Reserve, 1720-1; Milner to interview, 1731; at conference of 25/3/18, 1737; Unity of Command and, 1738; is converted to Foch's point of view, 1740; 1744; in favour of Foch's appointment as "General of the Coalition," 1745; accepts agreement based on proposals for Unity of Command made by Sir H. Wilson, 1748; on Pétain, 1751; 1752; French support for British troops and, 1763; Abbeville Conference of May, 1918, and, 1775-7; 1799; use of American troops and, 1824; 1828; irreplaceable, 1843; recalls Sarraill, 1914; unsympathetic to Salonika expedition, 1915; agrees to replacement of British troops by Indian in Salonika, 1915; in favour of Balkans offensive, 1917; Bulgaria's collapse and, 1946-7; instructs d'Espèrey to treat British less cavalierly, 1950; likes Wilson's reply to German note, 1957; Lloyd George's quarrel with over Turkish Armistice, 1974-7; on terms of peace with Austria, 1978; criticisms of Fourteen Points, 1979; his account of German reception of Armistice terms, 1983; on question of revictualing German Army, 1984; announces signature of Armistice, 1985; Unity of Command and, 2024-6.

**CLEMENTEL, ETIENNE**, demands more corn for France, 797; threatens to resign, 798.

**CLERGY**, question of conscripting, 1597-8.

**CLERK, SIR GEORGE R.**, on Russian situation, 943-4.

**CLYDE-SIDE STRIKE (1915)**, meeting on, 104.

**CLYNES, J. R.**, munition workers and, 206; rationing and, 795; writes to congratulate Lloyd George on his speech in Caxton Hall, 1493-4; attends conference between Labour and Government, 1593.

**COALITION GOVERNMENT**, formation of first, 136 *et seq.*

**COBDEN, RICHARD**, 131, 444.

"**COCHRANE**," dispatched to Murmansk, 1893.

**COLBY, BAINBRIDGE**, Assistant Secretary to United States Treasury, 1565, 1796; troop-transport and, 1800, 1801.

**COLONIAL CONFERENCE (1907)**, foreign affairs and, 28.

**COLONIES, GERMAN**, Robertson's peace proposals and, 498, 501-2; Smuts on, 910; America's attitude to British seizure of, 1011; restoration of insisted upon, 1512; to be administered in interests of inhabitants, 1515-16; Britain picks up, 1930.

**COMMAND, UNITY OF**. [*See under* Unity of Command.]

**COMPIÈGNE**, conference at, Foch calls, 1627; French G.H.Q. at, bombed (22/3/18), 1734.

**CONSCRIPTION**, Metternich on, 7-8, 15; Lloyd George's opinion on, 20-1, 156; coming of,

- 426 *et seq.*; disliked in Britain, 426; Lloyd George's evidence before Cabinet Committee, 431-2; divisions in Cabinet on, 433; first step towards, 436; Lloyd George's speech of May, 1916, on, 439-40; part taken by Lloyd George in introduction of, 440; whether we should enforce it after the War, 631; difficulty of enforcing, 802-3; industrial, not practicable, 1143; 100,000 men anxious to avoid, 1153; "combing-out" causes trouble, 1157; of wealth, 1596; in Ireland, 1597-1601; introduced in Canada and New Zealand, but not in Australia, 2006-7.
- CONSERVATIVE PARTY**, German sympathies of, 2-3; approves idea of Party truce (1910), 22-3; demands retirement of Lloyd George as price of Party truce, 22; supports Asquith administration, 129; eager for war with Germany, 129-30; Dardanelles and, 136; objections of, to Haldane and M'Kenna, 137-8; drink trade and, 197-8; distrustful of Lloyd George, 596; obstruct Lloyd George, 620 *et seq.*; Lloyd George negotiates with over personnel of new Government, 632-3; their intense hatred of Churchill, 636-8; members of, in Lloyd George Government, opposed to dismissal of Haig, 1409.
- CONSTANTINE XII, KING OF GREECE**, Kitchener talked over by, 314; sympathetic to Germans, 317-8; friend of the Kaiser, 550; his struggles with Venizelos, 565; played fast and loose with Allies, 820; masses troops in Thessaly, 821; doubts about his attitude to Allies, 846; deserved well of Germany, 1246; ready to put Greek Army at disposal of Central Powers, 1633; Allies compel him to abdicate, 1912; opposed to Sarraïl, 1912.
- CONSTANTINOPLE**, future of, 1506.
- CONVOY SYSTEM**, first proposed, 677; Admiralty opposes introduction of, 677 *et seq.*; experiments with, 687-8; Admiralty accepts, 692; Committee on, set up, 693-4; Convoy Department established, 694; complete success of, 702-6; achievements of Convoy Committees and Port Convoy Officers, 741-2; example of working of, 1396.
- COOK, SIR EDWARD**, warns H. A. Gwynne against Repington's article, 1678.
- COOPER, ALFRED DUFF**, 1742; his editing of Haig's diaries, 2011-31; a skilled dialectician whose extracts from Haig's diaries were chosen from point of view of controversy, 2013; practically admits Lloyd George right about Haig, 2014; thinks Haig a good soldier but without genius, 2014; dwells on selflessness of his hero, 2016; unconsciously displays Haig's unpleasant traits, 2018; fails to find a single word of acknowledgment of Lloyd George's efforts to produce men and munitions in Haig's diaries, 2019-23; on Battle of Somme, 2022; attempts to prove that Unity of Command was brought about by Haig, 2023-6; his mis-statements, about Doullens episode, 2025; refuted by Foch himself, 2025-6; the mis-statements in his extracts about March, 1918, defeat, 2026-9; prominence he gives to Derby's intrigues, 2031.
- COPPER**, Germany lacks, 225; Anglo-American dispute over America's trade with Germany in, 397-8.
- CORN PRODUCTION BILL**, passing of, 766-9; Junker's opposition to 1918 Amendment, 783-5.
- COSSACKS**, condemn Bolsheviks and appeal for Allied aid, 1896-7.
- COWANS, SIR JOHN**, 50; administrative ability of, 466; Geddes and, 473; takes charge of Mesopotamian Army, 493; Lloyd George's impressions of, 495-6.
- COWDRAY, LORD**, 623; chairman of the Air Board, 642; his first report as chairman, 1102-3; reports increased aeroplane production, 1104; on policy of Air Board, 1109; why Lloyd George desired him to leave Air Ministry, 1110-1; resigns on Northcliffe's refusal of Air Ministry, becoming an enemy to Lloyd George, 1112.
- COWPER, GENERAL**, threatens to arrest Carter, 491.
- COX, BRIGADIER-GENERAL**, his estimates of position of German divisions in Spring, 1918, 1697-8; gives exact area of attack and exact date of Spring, 1918, offensive, 1706.
- CRAIGAVON, LORD**, at Irish Conference in May, 1916, 420-1.
- CRAWFORD, LORD**, on food problem in 1916, 515-16; conditions of Armistice and, 520; proposes central food department, 576-7; arguments in support of proposal, 578-9; grain supplies and, 580; has difficulty in inducing Cabinet to discuss food shortage, 583-4; fruitlessness of his appeals, 651, 757; allotments and, 786.
- CRAWFORD, SIR RICHARD**, American loans and, 1015-6, 1018.
- CRAVATH, PAUL**, 1795.
- CREUSOT**, failure of, the cause of Russian collapse, 266.
- CREWE, LORD**, approves idea of Party truce (1910), 22, 28, 102; Dardanelles plan and, 235; Lloyd George's "Big Gun Programme" and, 334; on possibility of conscription, 429; Mesopotamia campaign and, 481; situation in November, 1916, and, 539.
- CRIMEAN WAR**, 75.
- CROMER, LORD**, denounces Irish settlement, 422-3.
- CRONSTADT**, conditions in (1917), 1522-3; sailors of, the fighting crusaders of the Revolution, 1533.
- CROSBY, OSCAR T.**, American loans and, 1021; members of American Mission to England, 1795.
- CROWE, SIR EYRE**, views on disarmament, 1038; his memorandum on disarmament makes Lord R. Cecil pessimistic, 1040; summary of his views on Lord R. Cecil's peace schemes (1916), 1062-5.
- CROWN COLONIES**, their contribution to the War, 2006-7.
- CTESIPHON**, Townshend repulsed at, 482.
- CULTIVATION OF LANDS ORDER**, allotments and, 786.
- CUNLIFFE, SIR WALTER** (later Lord), 62; Financial Crisis (1914) and, 63-4; character



- of, 68-9; visits Paris with Lloyd George, 241; Balkans and, 243; member of Mission to America, 997.
- CURRAGH MUTINY**, 128; Sir Henry Wilson's part in, 1688.
- CURRIE, GENERAL**, a brilliant leader, though a civilian, 201.
- CURZON, VISCOUNT**, 22; shell shortage and, 126; disinterestedness of, in 1914, 130-1; Salonika and, 298; discovers that men at front want conscription, 434; situation in November, 1916, and, 539; grain supplies and, 580; strongly opposed to Montagu's aeroplane scheme, 583; challenged by Balfour on aeroplane issue, 583; a member of the ruling class, 610; distrusted by Tories, 622; 624; member of first War Cabinet, 634; on nobility and gloriousness of Somme offensive, 652; dislikes Carson, 699; chairman of Shipping Control Committee, 722; his Committee unable to deal with situation, 725; resigns Shipping Control to join War Cabinet, 727; restriction of timber imports and, 751; industrial compulsion and, 806; French delegates to Petrograd Conference and, 929; at Imperial War Cabinet, 1036; peace terms, and, 1037; 1059; appeals for better air organisation, 1098; appointed Chairman of Air Board, 1098; issues first report of Air Board, 1099; his duel with Balfour over Air Board, 1099; 1100-1; ceases to be Chairman of Air Board, 1101; 1133; Haig's Flanders project and, 1272, 1291-2; inclined to support Passchendaele plans, 1293; Italian Front and, 1303; on Man-power Committee, 1576; American troop-transport and, 1801; his additional peace proposals, 1963-4.
- CZECH LEGION**, usefulness of, 1900; resists Bolsheviks, 1900-1; problem of transporting it to France, 1903.
- CZERNIN, COUNT**, his remarks on peace terms, 1179-80; 1186; Austro-Italian peace moves and, 1193, 1194; his note attached to Karl's second letter, 1197-8; willing to discuss peace terms, 1478; idealism of, 1481; in sympathy with British ideals, 1488; 1495; adopts a friendly attitude to Lloyd George's declaration of war aims, 1498-9; Foreign Office suspicious of, 1500; proposal for separate Austrian peace and, 1500-1; his ardour for peace apparently cooling, 1501-2; vague in statement of War aims, 1512; replies ambiguously to Trotsky's peace proposals, 1549; on food shortage, 1889.
- "DACIA" INCIDENT**, Anglo-American relations and, 399-400.
- "DAILY HERALD,"** 1677.
- "DAILY MAIL,"** 123.
- "DAILY NEWS,"** quoted as evidence concerning state of public opinion in August, 1914, 41 *et seq.*; 1139.
- DANUBE, RIVER**, importance of, 1920.
- DARDANELLES**, delay in landing troops in, 24; disappointment over failure in, 133; Fisher and, 134-5; M'Kenna and, 135; obscures munitions issue, 139; responsibility for failure in, 139; formation of Committee on, 142; Joffre and, 229; War Council and, 231 *et seq.*; Kitchener supports campaign in, 234-5; plan adopted, 235; War Council views in *February (1915)*, 246-8; why Lloyd George opposed plan, 248; Allied procrastination in, 249 *et seq.*; effect of success in, 255; failure of expedition, 259-60; indecision in, 289; no further troops to be sent to, 296; French objections to offensive in, 297; conclusions of Committee on, 298; Lloyd George on prospects in (12/10/15), 304; effects of Allied failure in, 307, 309-10; Lord Charles Beresford on, 312; obtuseness of military mind about, 547-8; Carson opposed to scheme, 608-9; Churchill's responsibility for, 637, 638; factor of surprise and, 833; Champagne and Artois offensive responsible for failure at, 2035.
- DAVIDSON, GENERAL**, assures Nivelle that Haig is in general agreement with him, 885.
- DAVIES, SIR JOHN T.**, goes to Ministry of Munitions as Lloyd George's Secretary, 148; Lloyd George's "Big Gun Programme" and, 334.
- DEBENEY, GENERAL**, informs Haig of French weakness, 1267; 1868.
- DEFENCE OF THE REALM ACT**, provisions of third edition of, 106; reasons for introduction of, 155; War Office and, 160; Labour shortage and, 176; liquor trade and, 200-1; munitions and, 342; Lansdowne insists on operation of in Ireland, 423; prosecutions under, 631; Corn Production Bill and, 767.
- DELBRÜCK, PROFESSOR**, his gratitude for the *Morning Post's* betrayal of Allied plans, 1676; conceives that Lloyd George had a better military understanding than Ludendorff, 1676.
- DELCASSÉ, THÉOPHILE**, resignation of, 8; Balkans and, 242-4.
- DELMÉ-RADCLIFFE, GENERAL**, 1287; Italian Front and, 1303; implores help for Italy, 1385; his Italian reports, 1386; 1461.
- DEMOCRACY**, Lloyd George on value of, at Imperial War Cabinet, 1050; does not exist in Germany, 1959.
- DEMOCRATIC CONTROL**, Union of, revolutionary activities of, 1153.
- DENMAN, MR.** (ex-head of American Shipping Board), influences Wilson, 1012.
- DEPARTMENTAL INTERNECINE WARFARE**, harm done by, 1102.
- DERBY, LORD**, munitions and, 157; becomes Director of Recruiting, 434-5; Under-Secretary for War, 472; Haig snubs, 472; approves of Lloyd George's War Committee proposals, 587; wants Asquith retained, 591; a member of the ruling class, 610; agriculture and, 629; president of Air Committee, 1097-8; assistance given to Lord Cowdray by, 1102, 1103; 1370; General Reserve and, 1670; Lloyd George interviews, on General Reserve question, 1673; Robertson and, 1673; refuses to join military clique against Lloyd George, 1677; denounces *Morning Post* article, 1678; dislikes Sir H. Wilson, 1689; resigns three times in 24 hours, 1689-90; American

- Mission and, 1800; on pessimism in Paris, in *May, 1918*, 1843; Duff Cooper gives prominence in Haig's diaries to his intrigues against Government, 2031.
- DERBY SCHEME**, unsatisfactory results of, 434-6.
- DESCHANEL, PAUL**, succeeds Clemenceau, 1608.
- DES GRAZ, MR.**, Balkan situation (*1915*) and, 236.
- DEVELOPMENT AND ROAD IMPROVEMENT FUNDS ACT**, timber and, 750.
- DEVILLE, GENERAL ST. CLAIR**, announces substitution of H.E. for shrapnel, 85; explains steps taken to increase supplies of munitions in France, 91-2.
- DEVLIN, JOSEPH**, personality of, 420-1; Lansdowne and, 423-4; Irish conscription question and, 1600.
- DEVONPORT, LORD**, appointed to control food supplies, 641, 758-9, 760; at War Cabinet session on food, 761; appoints committee to study rationing, 788; takes steps to see that food is fairly distributed, 788; appeals for voluntary rationing, 789-90; resigns Food Controllorship, 791; liquor control and, 791-2.
- DIAZ, GENERAL**, 1396; appointed to succeed Cadorna, 1397; Italian King agrees to his promotion, 1403; General Reserve and, 1713; reserves in *March, 1918*, and, 1715; 1716; Foch's control of Allied Armies and, 1776.
- DILLON, JOHN**, difficult temperament of, 420-1.
- DILUTION**, questions concerning, 1587.
- DISRAMENT**, discussed at Imperial War Cabinet, 1037-41; ideas of Vatican on, 1216; Count Mensdorff's views on, 1477.
- DISRAELI, BENJAMIN** (Earl of Beaconsfield), 5, 35, 47, 56, 621.
- DIVISIONS**, reduction in size of, 1581-2.
- DJEMAL PASHA**, 1505.
- DOBELL, GENERAL**, his bungled attack on Gaza, 1922-3.
- DOGGER BANK**, Battle of, 1457.
- DOMINIONS, BRITISH**, raising troops in, 253-4; their contribution to victory, 1023 *et seq.*; 2005-6.
- DONALDSON, SIR F.**, removed from Woolwich, 351.
- DONETZ COAL BASIN**, importance of, 1554.
- DONOP, SIR STANLEY VON**, 50; rifles from U.S.A. and, 97-8; War Office and private firms and, 99; shell shortage and, 100; 102; rifle shortage and, 102, 104-5; Munitions of War Committee and, 108; Montagu and, 109, 110; munitions and, 112; resigns part of his responsibilities to Ministry of Munitions, 163; Lloyd George's "Big Gun Programme" and, 334; Inventions Department of Ministry of Munitions and, 373; control of design by Ministry of Munitions and, 377; 495.
- DOUAUMONT**, capture of, by Nivelles, 875-6.
- DOUGLAS, SIR CHARLES**, 50.
- DOULLENS CONFERENCE**, agreement arrived at during, 1719; 1731; 1738-41; opinions of Poincaré, Bliss and Milner, 1740; Duff Cooper's mis-statements about, 2025.
- DOUMERGUE, GASTON**, at Petrograd Conference, 931; Miliukoff and Maklakoff appeal to, 940; obtains Czar's consent to French annexations, 947-8; exceeds his instructions, 949.
- DREADNOUGHT**, pernicious influence of, 5-6; Metternich on the, 11.
- DREYFUS AFFAIR**, 1717.
- DRINK TRADE**, problems presented by (*1915*), 144; munition production and, 192 *et seq.*; Defence of Realm Act and, 200; 201; Kitchener and, 259; improvement in national sobriety, 792-3; poor quality of beer and spirits during War, 1145. [See also under *Brewing and Liquor*.]
- DU CANE, GENERAL**, at Ministry of Munitions, 168; Lloyd George meets him at Boulogne Conference, 329 *et seq.*; widens his outlook at Boulogne Conference, 331; letter from, on War Office's incompetence, 375-6; in control of Department of Munitions Design, 378; his memorandum on Relations with the War Office, 378-9; suggested Chief of Imperial General Staff, 1672.
- DUCKHAM, SIR ARTHUR**, at Ministry of Munitions, 151.
- DUFF, ADMIRAL SIR A.**, against introduction of convoy system, 680; meets Lloyd George and Carson to discuss convoy system, 685; changes his mind about convoys, 692; Gibraltar Convoy and, 693; head of convoy system, 703.
- DUFF, SIR BEAUCHAMP**, blunders of, 483; excuses for his inefficiency, 484; sets up Commission to inquire into failure of medical services in Mesopotamia, 488; threatens to dismiss Cowper for asking for river transport, 491; rejects offers of help in Mesopotamia, 491; deception about Indian reserves and, 492; severely censured, 492.
- DUKE, H. E.**, appointed Irish Chief Secretary, 424; opposed to conscription in Ireland, 1598; 1599; attempts at voluntary recruiting in Ireland and, 1600.
- DUMBA, CONSTANTIN**, deported from U.S.A., 403.
- DUNSTERVILLE, GENERAL**, his Caspian activities, 1909.
- ECKHARDT, VON**, Zimmermann's note to, on German-Mexican Alliance, 988.
- EDMONDS, GENERAL**, on Fifth Army defences in *March, 1918*, 1704.
- EDUCATIONAL REFORM** during War, due to H. A. L. Fisher, 1988; under-payment of teachers, 1988-9; lack of post-primary education, 1989; Fisher's memoranda, 1990; War Cabinet approves programme, 1991; the Burnham scale, 1991; Bill of 1917, 1992; revised Bill of 1918, 1992-3; summary of measure, 1993; grants to Universities, 1993-4; the 1921 Consolidating Act, 1994.
- EDWARD VII, KING**, Germany and, 18.

- EGORIEFF, LIEUTENANT-GENERAL, Army** food shortage and, 968.
- EHRLICH (Russian), at Paris Socialist Conference, 1128.**
- ELECTIONS AND REGISTRATION ACT (1915), 1164.**
- ELECTORAL REFORM, 1164-74; report of Speaker's Conference on, 1166-8; Tory revolt against Speaker's Conference recommendations, 1169-70.**
- ELLIOTT, SIR FRANCIS, at Rome Conference, 838.**
- ELLIS, SIR CHARLES, at Ministry of Munitions, 150.**
- ELLIS, TOM, 2.**
- ELLIS, MR., recommends Lord Chetwynd to Lloyd George, 355.**
- "EMDEN," 2010.**
- ENTENTE, ANGLO-FRENCH, Lord Rosebery on, 1; Metternich and, 8-9, 14.**
- ENVER PASHA, defeated by Yudenitch, 1071; a Germanophile, 1490; hopes to be dictator of Turkey, 1505; 1507; von Sanders protests to, against withdrawal of German troops, 1924-5.**
- ERDÖDY, COUNT, acts as Karl's emissary, 1190; text of message communicated to Sixte by, 1191-3; discusses details of Austrian peace proposals, 1194-5; 1196; 1197.**
- ERZBERGER, MATTHIAS, heads delegation to meet Foch, 1980; signs Armistice, 1982; instructed to sign by German Government, 1983.**
- ESHER, LORD, on effect of English conscription on public opinion abroad, 441-2; Lloyd George discusses transport with, 472; assists Haig to intrigue against Lord French and Kitchener, 2018.**
- D'ESPEREY, GENERAL FRANCHET, Gallieni's plan and, 228; suggests Italian offensive, 836; a mediocre success, 871; urges Italian advance, 900; to replace Guillaumat at Salonika, 1916; in favour of offensive in Salonika, 1917; dictates Armistice terms to Bulgaria, 1920; attacks on Salonika Front, 1944; Bulgarian peace terms and, 1946-7; treats British forces cavalierly, 1950; General Milne and, 1977; to invade Germany from south, 1979.**
- EVANS, SIR SAMUEL, 65.**
- EWART, W. H. L., his secret service work, 988.**
- EXCHEQUER, CHANCELLOR OF, Lloyd George becomes, 4.**
- FACTORY AND WORKSHOP ACTS, Industrial welfare and, 208.**
- FAIRHOLME, COLONEL, at Rome Conference, 838.**
- FALKENHAYN, ERICH VON, overwhelms Roumanians, 324; on the inadvisability of attempting to break through a resolute defence, 825; 835; opposes Hoetzendorff's plans for Italian offensive, preferring Verdun, 861-3; confesses the motive behind his preference, 863; commands Turks against Maude, 1079; fortifies Gaza, 1090; his plans defeated by Allenby, 1901; 1247; in charge of Turks, 1923.**
- FALKLAND ISLANDS, Battle of, 1457.**
- FARRINGTON, LORD, withdraws from shipping control, 727.**
- FAVRE, JULES, 1606.**
- FAYLE, C. E., on the Diversion of Shipping Committee, 737; on problems of restriction of non-essential imports, 745.**
- FEISAL, EMIR, attacks Medina, 1075.**
- FERDINAND OF AUSTRIA, GRAND DUKE, assassination of, 32-3.**
- FERDINAND OF BULGARIA, CZAR, his attitude to Allies, 246; joins Germany, 293; attacks Roumania, 325; his loyal rapacity, 533; his dominions immune from naval attack, 821.**
- FERRY, ABEL, 1283.**
- FESTUBERT, Battle of, French's account of, 119.**
- FIELD SERVICE REGULATIONS (1935), quoted, 1709.**
- FIFTH ARMY, its defences neglected in March, 1918, 1702-4; Haig's neglect of, 1707-8; 1735 *et seq.*; cheerfulness of, 1745; magnificent fight put up by, 1755.**
- FIGHTING, necessity of, 1595.**
- FINANCE, financiers not guilty of causing the War, 45; crisis in 1914, steps taken to deal with, 61 *et seq.*; munition production and, 78 *et seq.*; problem of, 1565.**
- FINDLAY, SIR M., Austrian peace overtures and, 1177.**
- FINLAND, virtually a German protectorate, 1894.**
- FISHER, H. A. L., head of Board of Education, 642; his educational reforms during War, 1988-94; his memorandum on reforms, 1990.**
- FISHER, ADMIRAL SIR JOHN (later Lord), lack of small craft and, 6; on invincibility of the Navy, 20; Churchill and, 133; resignation of, 134-7; suggests attacking Germany from Denmark, 222; Dardanelles plan and, 235; on Lloyd George's memorandum of 22/2/15 on Balkan situation, 256; Inventions Board of Admiralty and, 371; Royal Flying Corps and, 1096; his memorandum on Armistice, 1972.**
- FITZGERALD, BRINSLEY, 119.**
- FLAVELLE, SIR JOSEPH, munitions production and, 2009.**
- FLESQUIÈRES SALIENT, handicap of, 1736.**
- FLETCHER, SIR W. M., munition workers and, 206.**
- FOCH, MARSHAL, on lessons of 1914 campaign, 53; 56; Lloyd George's meeting with, 94-5; promises "no more retreats," 220; opposed to Somme offensive, 322; no able advisers for, 323; Robertson disapproves of, 469; inadequate equipment in Salonika and, 549; ruled out as a successor to Joffre, 871-2; on the Aisne offensive, 904-5; his estimate of military position towards end of 1917, 1242, 1243; a man of integrity, 1262; denounces "folly of a great general offensive," 1264; opposed to the Haig strategy, 1265; condemns Flanders plan, 1266; supports Cadorna, 1287; Cadorna entreats aid of, 1377-8; his attitude to Cadorna's**



requests for help, 1378-9; inclined to favour Italian offensive, 1379; convinced of primary importance of Italian Front, 1379; supports Italian offensive plans at London Conference, 1380-1; 1385; ready to help Italy, 1389; visits Italy, 1395; 1397; reports on state of Italian armies, 1397; convinced of incompetence of Italian G.H.Q., 1399; at Peschiera Conference, 1403; the first independent Chief of Staff, 1410; appointed permanent military representative on Inter-Allied Council, 1440; Unity of Command and, 1449; scoffs at Haig, 1452; grasps change in situation, caused by Russian collapse, 1453; gives Germans no time to reorganise, 1474; Russian situation and, 1531; incapable of comprehending importance of sea-power, 1564; at Versailles War Council of 1/12/17, 1617; Italian Front and, 1618-9; his plan for the campaign for 1918, 1623-4; disagrees with Pétain, 1626; at Compiègne Conference, 1627-9; at variance with both Haig and Pétain, 1628; difficulty of making him Generalissimo, 1628-9; his reasons for forming a General Reserve, 1630; Versailles staff veer towards his view concerning offensives in 1918, 1632-3; Haig and Pétain jealous of, 1635; alone in viewing 1918 campaign hopefully, 1635; Haig at variance with 1636; Robertson at variance with, 1637; discusses General Reserve, 1637 *et seq.*; too be President of General Reserve, 1641-2; ultimately in sole command of Allied armies, 1642; on Flanders offensive, 1655; question of extension of British Front and, 1656; opposed to idea of vast offensives, 1657; Haig and Pétain dislike idea of his commanding their reserves, 1669; 1674; the last man to submit to civilian dictation, 1674; 1675; Sir H. Wilson the only soldier to appreciate, 1688; Haig reconciled to idea of him as President of General Reserve, 1689-90; 1710, 1711, 1712; in the dark about Pétain's attitude to General Reserve, 1716; his appointment fatal to General Reserve, 1717; despised by British G.H.Q., and hated by Clemenceau for being a Catholic, 1717-18; contest between Clemenceau and, 1718-19; Haig and Clemenceau in agreement about, 1719-20; his protest against killing of General Reserve scheme, 1720-1; reason for his anxiety about General Reserve, 1726; his plans for use of General Reserve, 1729; Lloyd George decides that he should command Allied Armies, 1730-1; his plucky attitude on 25/3/18, 1737-8; at Doullens Conference, 1738; charged with task of co-ordinating action of Allied Armies, 1740; enemy winning when appointed co-ordinator, 1742; dissatisfied with Doullens Agreement, 1743-4; War Cabinet opposes his appointment as commander of Allied Armies, 1744; Clemenceau supports, 1745; states his views on Doullens Agreement, 1745-6; looking forward to an offensive, 1746; Lloyd George's speech in favour of, at Beauvais Conference, 1746-8; Haig and Wilson declare themselves in favour of his appointment to direct Allied Armies, 1748-9; becomes strategic director of Allied forces, 1749; made Commander-

in-Chief of Allied forces, 1749-50; on Pétain, 1751; his reputation dimmed by Artois offensive, 1751-2; orders five French divisions to support British, 1763; not anxious about Lys attack, 1765; takes hopeful view of advance across Lys, 1766-7; his strategy vindicated, 1767; his hopeful message of 17/4/18, 1768; sends further reinforcements to British, 1769, refuses to discuss retreat, 1770; Ludendorff and, 1771; given time to mature plans for counter-stroke, 1772; questions relating to his control of Italian Army, 1775-7; 1790, 1793; 1811; American Army and, 1823; unable to convince Pershing of the wrongness of his attitude on American troops, 1824; insists that priority be given to American combatant troops, 1824; disgusted with Pershing, 1825; wants 100 American divisions, 1828; value of Unity of Command under, 1835-6; 1837; disagrees with Haig about locality of German summer offensive, 1918, 1838; unpopular because of his failure to arrest May advance, 1843; confident of victory, 1843-4; counters Montdidier-Noyon attack, 1845; prepares attack near Chateau Thierry, 1847; attacks from Villers-Cotterets, 1848; on British part in attack of 1/8/18, 1848-9; surprises Ludendorff, 1849; von Kuhl on importance of Unity of Command under, 1850; his counter-stroke of 18/7/18 ends possibility of further German offensives, 1853; his view of position on 24/7/18, 1853-6; 1857; Wilson's cautious view of his success after Villers-Cotterets, 1859; always optimistic, 1867; plans successful attack of 8/8/18, 1868-9; controls Haig, Pétain and Pershing, 1876; plans final advance, 1877-8; starts general offensive, 1880; foresees a 1919 campaign, 1910-11; urges Italians to attack, but in vain, 1928; his advice on strategy after Bulgarian collapse, 1948; peace terms discussed by, 1954; on conditions of German armistice, 1955-6; delays Germans in their evacuation of Allied territory, 1958; on Ludendorff and Hindenburg, 1965; 1979; authorised to communicate armistice terms to Germany, 1980; receives German delegates, 1981; replies to German objections to armistice terms, 1983; 1984; announces signature of armistice, 1984-5; 1993; Italian Front and, 2001; his qualities only just adequate to his job, 2014; his appointment as Generalissimo received with delight in British Army, 2015; Haig's contempt for, 2018; Haig and Pétain jealous of, 2023; Haig frightened into sending for, 2023-4; his appointment as co-ordinator due to Haig's panic and Milner's persuasion, 2024; his acknowledgment of the part played by Lloyd George in the introduction of Unity of Command, 2025-6; 2028.

FOKKER AEROPLANES, 1832.

FOOD, position regarding in autumn of 1916, 576 *et seq.*; Lloyd George suggests appointment of a Food Controller, 577; Lloyd George proposes State control of, 628-30; Devonport appointed to control, 641; adequate supplies of, an essential, 647-8; German shortage of, 648; Austrian shortage

- of, 648; one of the crucial issues of the War, 755-6; steps taken to solve problem of, 755-800; appointment of a controller urged, 757; Lloyd George's speech of 19/12/16 on, 759-60; decisions of War Cabinet (13/12/16) on, 761; Food Production Department set up, 762; guaranteed prices approved by Cabinet, 763-4; minimum wages introduced for agricultural workers, and wage boards set up 763-4; war declared on pheasants, 764; Lloyd George's proposals for compelling good cultivation, 766; passing of Corn Production Bill, 766-9; using prisoners of war for harvesting, 771; opposition from English Junkers to Corn Production Bill (1918), 783-4; rationing of, 787-95; first control orders, 788, 789; Lloyd George's appeal at Carnarvon as to rationing, 789; German difficulties about, in 1917, 790-1; local control committees set up, 793; six commissioners appointed, 794; measures to stop queues, 794-5; success of rationing system, 795; feeding our Allies, 795-800; International Board for co-ordinating supplies set up, 795-7; Inter-Allied Meat and Fats Executive set up, 797; arrangements for wheat purchase, 797; French demands as to corn, 797-8; Italian shortage of, 798; shipping, the real difficulty, 798; responsibility for feeding France and Italy assumed, 798-9; France's failure to play her part in co-ordination, 799-800; our system of control superior to that of other belligerents, 800; high price of, 1156-7; steps taken to ensure fair distribution and price of, 1159; effects of shortage in Germany, 1207-8; Austrian shortage of, 1472-3; America and shortage of, 1798-9; 1889-90.
- FORD, HENRY**, assistance given by, in mechanisation of agriculture, 774.
- FOREIGN AFFAIRS**, neglect of in England before 1914, 27 *et seq.*
- FORSTER, W. E.**, 642.
- "FORWARD,"** 1677.
- "FOURTEEN POINTS,"** Wilson foreshadows, 982; Wilson announces, 1494; America to adhere to, 1941-2; danger of their vagueness, 1959-60; Inter-Allied discussion of, 1979-80.
- "FOUR YEARS ON THE WESTERN FRONT,"** quoted, 1330.
- FOWLER, SIR H.**, at Ministry of Munitions, 151.
- FOX, CHARLES JAMES**, 2, 3, 47.
- FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR**, 2; Liberal attitude to, 130.
- "FRANKFORTER ZEITUNG,"** 1299.
- FRANKLIN, MR.**, submarine warfare and, 985.
- FRANZ, BARON**, Austrian peace overtures and, 1177.
- FRANZ JOSEPH, EMPEROR OF AUSTRIA**, his aversion to war, 34, 217; his determination to wage War whole-heartedly, 1175.
- FREDERICK THE GREAT**, 1982.
- FREEDOM OF THE SEAS**. *See under Seas.*
- FREELAND, GENERAL**, transport problems and, 473.
- FRENCH, FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN** (later Earl of Ypres), on Territorials in Battle of Ypres, 24; strategical proposals of, in 1914, 49 *et seq.*; his reputation founded on cavalry exploits, 76; appeals for more munitions, 85 *et seq.*; shell requirements of, 112 *et seq.*; shell shortage at Neuve Chapelle and, 113-4; replies to accusation that he had wasted shells, 115; sends deputation to politicians and pressmen, 119-20; 195; strategy and, 214-5; Kitchener's strategical ideas in *January, 1915*, and, 227; on improbability of success on Western Front, 228; Salonika campaign and, 234; Lloyd George visits his headquarters, 241; Balkans and, 242-5; Russian situation and, 264; alive to dangers of offensive of *September, 1915*, 290; supports Joffre on subject of offensive of *September, 1915*, 292; on necessity of adjustment in military outlook, 328; sends artillery expert to Boulogne Conference, 329; results of Boulogne Conference and, 332; Lloyd George's "Big Gun Programme" and, 333; sets up an experimental committee at G.H.Q. to deal with inventions, etc., 368; prospect of German invasion and, 771-2; deposition of after Battle of Loos, 1311; his view of military situation in *October, 1917*, 1425-31; his criticisms of Haig's ideas and actions, 1425 *et seq.*; his criticisms of Robertson, 1427-9; reason for his dismissal from position of Commander-in-Chief, 1732; Haig's condemnation of, 2011; Haig's ignoble treatment of, 2018-9; Haig makes the error he condemned him for, years later, 2028; fell by the daggers of his colleagues, 2031.
- FRENCH REVOLUTION**, 2.
- FREYCINET, C. L. DE**, 1718.
- "FRIGHTFULNESS,"** German, fresh outbreak of, towards end of War, 1961-2.
- "FROM CHAUFFEUR TO BRIGADIER"** (Baker-Carr), 357-8.
- FRYATT, CAPTAIN**, 662.
- FULLER, SIR J. B.**, Director of Timber Supplies, 751-2.
- FULLER, GENERAL, J. F. C.**, plans a theatrical tank attack, 1334.
- FURSE, BISHOP**, his letter to *The Times* on shell shortage, 123-4.
- GALLAGHER, WILLIAM**, sinister influence of, 188.
- GALLIENI, GENERAL JOSEPH**, Lloyd George meets, 92; on strategy of War, 228-9; Salonika and, 318; too ill to enforce ideas, 323; his Paris Defence Force at Battle of the Marne, 832; incapable of standing up to Joffre, 1410.
- GALLIOLI CAMPAIGN**. *See under Dardanelles.*
- GAMBETTA, LEON**, a theatrical sham, 1603; 1982.
- GARVIN, J. L.**, approves idea of Party truce (1910), 22.
- GAS, POISON**, first use of, 117; effects of use of at Ypres, 366; premature use of, 385;



- ordered in enormous quantities by the French, 1264.
- GASPARRI, CARDINAL**, on German peace note, 658; Vatican peace note and, 1217; German reply to Vatican peace note and, 1223.
- GAZA**, Battles of, 1074; 1085; 1086; Chetwode and Dobell bungle attack on, 1922-3.
- GEDDES, SIR AUCLAND**, takes over National Service, 812; unrest among South Wales miners and, 814; has conference with Labour leaders, 1593; conscription for Ireland and, 1597; asked to prepare an Irish conscription bill, 1597.
- GEDDES, SIR ERIC**, Lloyd George and, 148; personality of, 150; at Ministry of Munitions, 151, 163; assists Lloyd George to overcome War Office obstruction in matter of T.N.T., 346-7; work for shell-filling done by, 356; efforts made by to get machine-guns, 359-60; planning machine-gun programme, 362; shell production and, 386; three problems of warfare and, 470; goes to France to look into transport problems at Haig's invitation, 471-2; appointed Director of Military Railways at the War Office, 472-3; controls transport both in England and in France, 474; how transport was organised by, 476 *et seq.*, 623; recommended for Admiralty by Haig, 699-700; becomes First Lord of the Admiralty, stipulating that Jellicoe should not be immediately removed, 700; decides Jellicoe must go, 701-2; appointed Controller of the Navy, 734-5; opposed to any interference with R.N.A.S., 1109; transport preparations for Passchendaele and, 1248; his reorganisation of railways behind the lines, 1447; reports on President Wilson's attitude to peace terms, 1963.
- GENERALISSIMO**, difficulty of appointing, 1628-9. [See also *Unity of Command.*]
- GENERAL RESERVE**. See under *Inter-Allied Reserve*.
- GENERALS**, in modern warfare rarely see scene of operations, 1322-3; Lloyd George had no personal quarrel with, 2013; their functions in relation to Governments, 2032-43; underrate importance of Home Front, 2033; their responsibility for Russian Revolution, 2033-4; their inexperience of actualities of warfare, 2037-8; their cavalry obsession, 2038; run no personal risk in modern warfare, and do not bother to see the ground over which they propose to advance, 2042-3.
- GENERAL STAFF**, Haldane and creation of, 49; its function to provide impartial survey of all fronts, 1429.
- GEORGE IV, KING**, 958.
- GEORGE V, KING**, 42; munition workers and, 189-92; personally encourages Lloyd George on formation of Ministry of Munitions, 190-1; the drink problem and, 195-6; Kaiser and, 407; supports Derby Scheme, 435; on conscription, 442-3; adopts food rationing, 790; on intimate terms of friendship with Czar, 972; helps to preserve industrial peace, 1162-3; Karl's peace overtures and, 1184; interviews Sixte, 1198; to meet King of Italy and Poincaré in France, 1198-9.
- GERARD, J. W.**, his letter to Colonel House on *Lusitania*, 402; on Kaiser, 407.
- GIARDINO, GENERAL**, appointed assistant to Diaz, 1403; 1716.
- GIBB, SIR G.**, 102, 104; Labour organisation and, 258.
- GIBBS, SIR PHILIP**, extravagant reports of, 1319-20.
- GILINSKI, GENERAL**, worse than useless, 462; 554.
- GIOLIETTI, GIOVANNI**, approves of Italian peace approach to Austria, 1189; 1194, 1195; his struggle with Sonnino, 1203; 1222; leader of Italian peace party, 1392.
- GIROUARD, SIR PERCY**, munitions and, 112; at Ministry of Munitions, 148, 150; character and capacities of, 151-2; Armaments Output Committee and, 163; machine-gun production and, 359-60.
- GIVENCHY**, failure of German attack on, 1762.
- GLADSTONE, W. E.**, French sympathies of, 2-3; pacifist doctrines of, 4; 47, 56; peace and, 131; Bulgaria and, 217; 444; 1328.
- "GLOBE"**, attacks War Cabinet on General Reserve question, 1671, 1673.
- "GOEBEN"**, escape of, 51.
- GOLDENBERG (Russian)**, at Paris Socialist Conference, 1128.
- GOLTZ, COLMAR VON DER**, sent to Constantinople, 255.
- GOOLD-ADAMS, COLONEL**, recalled by War Office from Ministry of Munitions, 373-4.
- GOREMYKIN, Czar** and, 965.
- GORLICE**, Mackensen's attack at, 833.
- GORRINGE, GENERAL**, advances up the Karun River, 482; on mismanagement at Basra, 487-8.
- GOSCHEN, SIR E.**, declaration of War and, 45.
- GOSSOT, GENERAL**, at Boulogne Conference, 329; antiquated mentality of, 330.
- GOUGH, SIR HUBERT**, Haig's Passchendaele instructions to, 1305; criticises plans of G.H.Q., 1305; advises abandonment of Passchendaele campaign, 1309; continues offensive pessimistically, 1309-10; his vivid description of Passchendaele mud, 1311-2; 1315, 1322; unjust condemnation of, 1330; 1332, 1333, 1334; blamed for persisting in Passchendaele attack, 1370; a mere name to men in trenches, 1409; defeat of his army in spring of 1918, 1610; criticises Haig's forecast for 1918, 1697-8; 1702; on defences of Fifth Army in March, 1918, 1704; not furnished with necessary means of defence, 1708; Butler's promotion not fair to, 1725; his Army tired out, 1726; and not up to strength, 1728; G.H.Q. prevent him from using his reserves, 1732; his command taken over by Rawlinson, 1733; on G.H.Q.'s failure to understand situation in March, 1918, 1733; General Humbert visits his



- headquarters, 1734; first reinforcements received by, 1734; seen by Haig on, 24/3/18, 1735; unfair supersession of, 1741-2; impossible demands made upon, 1742; man-power question and, 1778; Haig's ignoble treatment of, 2019; the insufficiency of his defences in *March, 1918*, 2026-8; 2029.
- GOUGH-CALTHORPE, SIR S. A., question of command of naval forces in the Aegean and, 1974-7.
- GOURAUD, GENERAL H., on the Aisne offensive, 904-5.
- GOURKO, GENERAL, his estimate of Russian effectives, 617; co-ordination and, 841; on need for closer co-operation between Allies, 933, 935.
- GOVERNMENT (WAR OBLIGATIONS ACT), 67.
- GRAND-ROZOY, British storm heights of, 1848.
- GRANET, SIR GUY, deputy to Geddes at the War Office, 474.
- GREECE, Grey's calamitous advice to, 59; situation in *October, 1916*, 550; question discussed at Paris Conference, 565; comes in with Allies, 1912. [*See also* Balkans and Constantine XII.]
- GRENFELL, MR., rifles from America and, 98.
- GREW, JOSEPH, C., recipient of German peace note, 654.
- GREY, SIR EDWARD (later Viscount Grey of Fallodon), anti-French attitude of, 3; foreign policy of, 4; Metternich and, 7-8; approves idea of Party truce (1910), 22; on Lansdowne Treaty, 25; 26; 27; keeps secrets of foreign affairs from Cabinet, 28; 29; Anglo-French relations and, 30; his first announcement to Cabinet of gravity of situation in *July, 1914*, 33; limitations of, 35; his suggestions in *July, 1914*, 36; 39; public opinion forces him into War, 40; fatal hesitancy of, 40; undecided as to whether Britain should intervene in a Russo-German War, 43; 45, 50-1; estimate of his qualities, 55-60; lacked distinction, 56; aloof from Party conflicts, 57; immune from criticism, 57; diplomatic failures of, 59; owed his position to accident of birth, 59; ignorant of foreigners, 60; sacrifices Haldane, 138; Theodore Roosevelt and, 145-6; Greek offers of help and, 231-2; Dardanelles plan and, 235; Balkan situation in *January, 1915*, and, 236-8; Lloyd George's letter of 7/2/15 to, on Balkan situation, 242-5; wrecks proposal for Balkan Conference, 245-6; 248; Russia and, 272; his pledges to Serbia, 294; on Lloyd George's memorandum of 12/10/15, 305-6; considers question of allowing food supplies to reach Germany if submarine campaign were abandoned, 401; his proposal for a conference in *August, 1914*, 404-5; defeatist members of Cabinet depress, 408; House's proposals at Reading's dinner and, 411-2; reluctant to press idea of peace conference on Allies, 412; Roosevelt and, 414; Kitchener and, 456; uneasy about Allied prospects, 509; sets example of giving interviews to Press, 509; writes to Lloyd George about interview with Roy Howard, 511; fears expressed in letter of 20/9/16 falsified, 512; hoping for Wilson's mediation, 512; peace terms and, 519-20; adopts a non-committal attitude to Lansdowne's memorandum of *November, 1916*, 522; defends himself against Robertson's criticisms, 523; against an inconclusive peace, 532; situation in *November, 1916*, and, 539; helps Lloyd George to draft telegrams to Paris and to Rome about Paris Conference, 542-4; a member of the ruling class, 610-1; 622; quite futile during War, 630; Norwegian shipping and, 679; his failure to take action with regard to Russia, 963; Colonel House and, 993; declines leadership of permanent American Mission, 1000; Sykes-Picot Agreement and, 1084; approves of Lloyd George's peace aims, 1492; 1510.
- GRIERSON, SIR J. M., 50.
- GROENER, GENERAL, Labour troubles in Germany and, 918; succeeds Ludendorff, 1980.
- GUCHKOFF, A. I., his optimistic outlook after February Revolution, 950; on shortage of munitions and food, 967-8; 968; resignation of, 1120; Boer War and, 2038.
- GUEST, CAPTAIN F., 119, 1826.
- GUGGENHEIM COPPER GROUP, gives in to Britain, 398.
- GULLAUMAT, GENERAL, replaces Sarraill in Balkans, 1912; Indians at Salonika and, 1915; fails to prepare plans, 1916; recall of, 1916; his optimistic account of Balkan prospects, 1917-18; his plan for Balkan offensive to be carried out, 1919; Bulgarian peace terms and, 1946.
- GUINCHY, cavalry attack at, 79.
- GUTCHKOFF, M. *See* Guchkoff, A. I.
- GWYNNE, H. A. (editor of *Morning Post*), his part in betrayal of Allied plans, 1677, 1678.
- HAakon VII, King of Norway, Austrian peace overtures and, 1177-8.
- HAEFTEN, COLONEL VON, his idea of "Peace Offensive," 1931-2; eager for Kaiser's abdication, 1967.
- "HAGEN" attack on British Front, proposed, 1844, 1845; preparations for, 1846, 1847; abandoned, 1853.
- HAGUE, second conference at, naval limitation and, 13.
- HAIG, FIELD-MARSHAL EARL, 50; his reputation founded on cavalry exploits, 76; his attitude to offensive of *September, 1915*, 290; states objectives in *October, 1915*, 296; would have preferred to undertake Somme offensive later, 320; Lloyd George meets him on Somme Front, 322-3; no able advisers for, 323; failure of his strategy at the Somme, 326; munitions and, 336; on German machine-gun corps, 366; insists on premature use of tanks, 385; Russia and, 461; a sectional general, 468; compared with Robertson, 468; on the three problems of warfare, 470; Lloyd George suggests he should invite Geddes to look into transport problems, 472; Lloyd George discusses transport with, 472; takes warmly to Geddes, 473; wants Geddes to be Director of Transportation in France,

474-5; letters between Lloyd George and, on appointment of Geddes, 475-6; visits England to discuss transport questions, 477; pays tribute to Geddes's work on transport but omits to mention Lloyd George's part, 479; replies to Lansdowne memorandum of November, 1916, 521; inadequate equipment in Salonika and, 549; at Chantilly Conference, 568; unsuitable for delegate at Russian Conference, 582; recommends Geddes for Admiralty, 699; his opinions of Carson and Jellicoe, 699; desires to see Jellicoe removed, 701; holds false opinions about German weakness, 825; his refusal to face unpleasant facts, 831; his assumption that Passchendaele rendered Germans incapable of sparing troops for Italy, 831; Italian Front and, 850; unable to spare guns for Italian Front, 851; his strategical principle, 866; his limited vision, 869; his qualities and defects, 870; his readiness to assent to Nivelle offensive, 875; Nivelle's letter to, outlining his plans for an offensive, 881-3; reason for his opposition to Nivelle plan, 883-4; his reply to Nivelle on 1917 offensive, 884; demands return of divisions from Salonika, 884-5; Nivelle appeals to French War Minister about his disagreement with, 885-6; Lloyd George refuses to discuss 1917 offensive with Nivelle in absence of, 887; Robertson and, 887; Germans accustomed to his heavy-footed movements, 890; viciously resists Lloyd George's attempts to get Unity of Command, 891; his stubborn mind transfixed on the Somme, 891; at Calais Conference, 891-2; objects to idea of United Command, 893; protests against arrangements of Calais Conference, 894 *et seq.*; offended by Nivelle's peremptory manner, 895, 896-7; distrusted by Nivelle, 898; time wasted in allaying his fears about Unity of Command, 900; a planomaniac, 901; discusses Western Front position with Smuts, 909; on the defensive policy of French Government, 921; at Paris Conference of 4/5/17, 925 *et seq.*; Petrograd Conference and, 928; 1081, 1082; his warning about Air Force deficiencies, 1103; Home defence against air raids and, 1104-5; Air Force and, 1109; testifies to work done by Air Ministry, 1114-5; his misconceptions concerning morale of German Army, 1228, 1240; obsessed with Passchendaele and optimistic as to military outlook, 1242-3; his long preparations for Passchendaele, 1247-8; 1252; Plumer's Messines plan submitted to, 1252; none of his essential conditions for success prevail at Passchendaele, 1255; presses Lloyd George to urge the French to remain on offensive, 1258; incredulous of French difficulties, 1261; misrepresents French attitude, 1262; Sir Henry Wilson and, 1265; Pétain offends, 1266; his plans strongly condemned by Foch, 1266; blarneys Wilson, 1269; undertakes offensive at Messines Ridge, 1271; explains Flanders project to Cabinet, 1272 *et seq.*; his argument for Passchendaele, 1277-8; has poor opinion of German morale and heavy artillery, 1278; his reply to Lloyd George's attack on Passchendaele plan,

1289 *et seq.*; misrepresents French attitude to offensive, 1295; misleads Cabinet about Italian Front, 1295; anxious about weather conditions for Passchendaele, 1296; misrepresents attitude of generals to Passchendaele, 1297; Lloyd George's final appeal to on subject of Passchendaele, 1298-1304; hopes for victory in 1917, 1302-3; describes ground after Passchendaele, 1308; advised against continuing Passchendaele offensive by Gough, 1309-10; Plumer throws cold water on his hopes, 1310-1; prefers rather to gamble with men's lives than to admit an error, 1311; problem of dismissing, 1315; confident of success of Passchendaele even in September, 1917, 1315; his predictions of success, 1317; Northcliffe blindly supports, 1318; adulated by *The Times*, 1319; completely ignorant of state of ground at Passchendaele, 1323; admits futility of Passchendaele, 1325, 1328; refuses Pétain's request that British should occupy more front line, 1333; fails to appreciate value of tanks, 1334; ignorant of the causes of defeat at Cambrai, 1338; exculpated from blame for Cambrai disaster by *The Times*, 1338; difficulty of dismissing, 1366-7; painstaking but unimaginative, 1366-7; effect his dismissal might have had, 1369; refuses to dismiss Gough, 1370; too busy at Passchendaele to consider Cadorna's appeal for munitions, 1377; his attachment to Ostend objective prevents Italian offensive, 1379, 1380; his strategical ideas, 1405; not anxious for success on Italian Front, 1406-7; must be dismissed if strategy is to be changed, 1407-8; a mere name to men in the trenches, 1409; narrowness of his outlook, 1409; his removal would not touch the real problem, 1411; his views on military prospects in latter part of 1917, 1419-23; insists on maintaining predominant position in Allied Councils, 1423; incapable of changing his plans, 1425; refuses to attend War Cabinet meeting of 11/10/17, 1425; Lord French's criticisms of his estimate of position in late 1917, 1425 *et seq.*; his judgment on general situation warped by his immediate interests, 1429; tends to regard British Front as the only vital one in the West, 1432; directs British contingent in Flanders offensive, 1449; contemptuous of Nivelle strategy, 1452; scoffed at by Foch and Pétain, 1452; unmindful of changing military conditions, 1453; his memorandum on comparative advantages of offensive in Northern Belgium as against one from Italy, 1464-66; on fatigue of his forces, 1468; Passchendaele losses and, 1469; over optimistic concerning weakness of German Army, 1476; man-power question and, 1568, 1569-70; his fanciful estimates of man-power, 1570; commands a higher proportion of mechanical reinforcements than any other Allied Commander, 1575; 1578; opposes reduction in size of divisions, 1581-2; refuses to have "B" men in war zone, 1586; Irish conscription and, 1599; his views on military position in October, 1917, 1610-6; his contempt for German Army, 1610; his miscalculations, 1611; French official account of



his strategy, 1613-6; his letter of 19/10/17 to Pétain, 1613-5; Italian front and, 1619; continues to disagree with Pétain, 1622; inclined to agree with Pétain that 1918 offensives were impracticable, 1626; attends conference at Compiègne, 1627-9; dislikes idea of Inter-Allied Reserve, 1629; convinced he was a better soldier than Foch, 1630; suggests abandonment of Salonika, 1633; angrily opposed to proposal for General Reserve, 1635; his pessimistic outlook on 1918, 1636; Pétain agrees with, 1637; discussions about General Reserve and, 1637 *et seq.*; his reluctance to take over more line causes postponement of Nivelle offensive, 1653; question of extension of British Front and, 1656-7; personal rivalry between Nivelle and, 1657; his liking for great offensives, 1657-8; reaches agreement with Pétain on extension of his Front, 1659-60; 1661; refuses to extend Front beyond Barisis, 1662; Lloyd George supports him against Pétain and Clemenceau, 1663-4; changes his mind on extension of Front, 1664; his inconsistencies prevent sending of Italian reinforcements, 1665-6; his objections to extension of Front unsound, 1666-7; jealous of Foch, 1669; appointed by Asquith, 1671; Milner on, 1672; Lloyd George interviews him on General Reserve question, 1672; professes his readiness to accept General Reserve decisions, 1673; had not dissented from War Council's decision, 1674; Lloyd George had always referred to him publicly in eulogistic terms, 1677; eulogised by Asquith, 1680; 1683; puts up no fight for Robertson, 1689-90; prepared to work under Versailles arrangement, 1693; 1695; patriotic attitude adopted by, 1695-6; does not expect big German attack in 1918, 1697; thinks Germans will confine their attentions to the French, 1697; Pétain agrees with, 1698; neglects defences of Fifth Army, 1703; knows area of *March* (1918) offensive in advance, 1704-5; distributes his reserves very unwisely, 1705-6; the possible reason for his peculiar disposition of forces, 1706-7; his extraordinary attitude to Fifth Army, 1707-8; his conduct towards Fifth Army not strictly honourable, 1708; perhaps had never considered plan of General Reserve, 1709; convinced there would be a triple attack in *March* (1918), 1710; satisfied with his preparations for German offensive, 1710; did not desire to contribute to General Reserve, 1710-1; Sir Henry Wilson's delay in sending him note about General Reserve, 1713; determined to obstruct General Reserve formation, 1713-4; Sir Henry Wilson perturbed by his attitude to reserves, 1714-5; official announcement of his refusal to assist formation of General Reserve, 1715-6; takes advantage of Clemenceau's antipathy to Foch, 1719; his talk with Clemenceau about Foch, 1719-20; has poor opinion of Italians, 1721; his unwise staff appointments, 1722-5; his reinforcements plan breaks down, 1727; his arrangements with Pétain for reinforcements, 1729; Pétain and, 1731; prevents Gough from using his reserves,

1732; at Battle of Loos, 1732; slow to appreciate situation in *March*, 1918, 1733; fails to communicate with Pétain on 21st and 22nd *March* (1918), 1734; sees Pétain and Gough, 1735; the awful results of his attitude to General Reserve, 1735; places Fifth Army under Pétain's orders, 1737; Unity of Command and, 1738; his defeatist memorandum of 25/3/18, 1738-9; agrees to Foch's appointment as co-ordinator of Allied forces, 1740; unfairly removes Gough from command of Fifth Army, 1741; not ready to share authority with Foch, 1743; does not want Foch to command Allied Armies, 1744; 1746; gets angry with Lloyd George at Beauvais, 1746-7; declares himself in favour of Unity of Command, 1748; his opposition to Unity of Command, 1750, 1751; unacceptable to French as Generalissimo, 1751; General Reserve and, 1754; his policy as to reserves defended by Official History, 1755; Lys attack and, 1765; issues his "backs-to-the-wall" appeal, 1766; his apprehensions justified, 1769; in favour of retreat to ports, 1770; man-power question and, 1778; his complaints as to lack of men unjustified, 1781; not eager to support Maurice, 1784; his fighting strength on 21st *March*, 1918, 1785; Pétain and, 1790; American troops and, 1804-5; at Versailles Conference of 29/1/18 on American troops, 1808-9; does not envisage Americans being of use in 1918, 1810; stubbornness of, 1826; wants to retreat in direction of sea, 1836; over-estimates German resources, 1838; unable to appreciate Foch's strategy, 1847; on the attack of 28/7/18, 1848; value of his reinforcements to French, 1850; objects to plans laid down by Foch on 24/7/18, 1856; Sir Henry Wilson consults him on 21/7/18, 1857-8; agrees with Sir Henry Wilson's memorandum of 25/7/18 but is contemptuous of its verbiage, 1858; on Sir Henry Wilson's "nonsense," 1861; 1863; did not follow Sir Henry Wilson in his Far-Eastern flights, 1865; helps to make Smuts pessimistic (*July*, 1918), 1866; unreliability of his judgments, 1867; launches successful attack of 8/8/18, but fails to follow it up, 1868-9; does not realise importance of his Amiens victory, 1869-70; earns high credit as second-in-command to strategic genius, 1876-7; asked by Foch to capture Hindenburg Line, 1878; his brilliant performance in breaking through the Siegfried Line, 1880; under-estimates demoralisation of German Army in *October*, 1918, 1884; launches great attack of 4/11/18, 1884; foresees 1919 campaign, 1906; his pessimistic estimate of prospects in *October*, 1918, 1968-71; his armistice terms, 1970; followed by Smuts, 1972-3; 1997; Italian Front and, 2001-2; Lloyd George's comments on his diaries, 2011-31; his censorious criticisms of his associates, 2011; Lloyd George had no personal quarrel with, 2013; unequal to his task, 2014; industrious but uninspired, 2014; did not inspire his men, 2014; entirely dependent on others for essential information, 2015; the two documents that prove his incapacity, 2016;



- unselfish but self-centred, 2016; his inability to judge men, 2016-7; liked his associates to be silent and gentlemanly, 2017-8; his contempt for Foch, 2018; his intrigues against Lord French and Kitchener, 2018-9; his failure at Loos, 2019; his ingenuity in shifting blame to other shoulders than his own, 2018-9; his shabby treatment of Gough, 2019; his conspiracy to destroy General Reserve, 2019; his diaries contain no acknowledgment of Lloyd George's work in production of men and munitions, 2019-23; his acknowledgment of Lloyd George's work for munitions (23/9/10), 2021; his attitude to Unity of Command, which he is wrongly claimed to have brought about, 2023-6; frightened into sending for Foch, 2023-4; his attempt to shirk blame for *March*, 1918, defeat, 2026-30; his leisurely attitude in *March*, 1918, 2029; his mis-statement about Italian reinforcements, 2029-30; his mis-statement that Government failed to congratulate him on victories of *August*, 1918, 2030; Lloyd George's objections to Passchendaele plan and, 2036-7; his cavalry obsession, 2038; only took part in two battles during War, 2038; his estimates of French officers, 2041; no conspicuous officer better qualified for highest command than, 2042.
- HALDANE OF CLOAN, VISCOUNT**, foreign policy of, 4; approves idea of Party truce (1910), 22; Anglo-French relations and, 30; 45; preparations for War and, 49; 49-50; Grey and, 57; at mock battle of Hungerford, 78-9; 88; his work for the Army, 137-8; Conservatives succeed in ousting, 138; Territorials and, 232; Expeditionary Force created by, 426; on Common Law and Conscription, 429-30; best War Minister since Cardwell, 603; his kindness, energy and patriotism, 604; thinks little of Plumer's brains, 1689; 2035.
- HALL, ADMIRAL**, intercepts Zimmermann's message to von Eckhardt on German-Mexican alliance, 988-9.
- HALSBURY, LORD**, denounces Irish settlement, 423.
- HAMEL, Americans** disobey orders in attacking, 1846.
- HAMID, ABDUL**, Pan-Islamism of, 1070; his reforms for Armenians, 1246.
- HAMILTON, COMMANDER**, river transport shortage and, 485.
- HAMILTON, SIR IAN**, 50; on an Italian offensive, 866-7.
- HAMILTON-GORDON, GENERAL**, his part in defence against Aisne offensive of 27/5/18, 1840.
- "HAMPSHIRE,"** sinking of the, 455.
- HANBURY-WILLIAMS, SIR JOHN**, reorganisation of Russian transport system and, 937-8; Czar and, 964, 973.
- HANKEY, SIR MAURICE**, Committee of Imperial Defence and, 49; Dardanelles scheme and, 231 *et seq.*; appreciates potentialities of tanks, 382; Kitchener's death and, 456; Paris Conference (*November*, 1916) and, 555, 556; suggests to Lloyd George that a small committee be set up to arrange the day-to-day conduct of the War, 574; appointed to Cabinet Secretariat, 643; Convoy system and, 684; his memorandum on Convoy system, 685-7; at Rome Conference, 838, 854; Imperial War Cabinet and, 1032, 1441, 1664, 1742; American troops and, 1809; Austrian armistice and, 1978; the value of his records of events, 2012.
- HARDINGE, LORD**, Commander Wedgwood emphasises blunders of, 483; rejects offer of help in Mesopotamia, 491; deceives Home Government about troops available in India, 492; severely censured, 492-3.
- HARDINGE, SIR A.**, Kuhlmann peace move and, 1238.
- HARRINGTON, GENERAL SIR CHARLES**, Messines attack and, 1271; Milner and, 1672.
- HARRIS, SIR CHARLES**, Financial Adviser to War Office, 80; Asquith on, 108; control of design by Ministry of Munitions and, 377.
- HARRIS, LEVERTON**, attempts to prevent copper from reaching Germany, 398.
- HART, LIDDELL**, 1077, 1307-8.
- HATHAWAY, SURGEON-GENERAL**, objects to Major Carter's truthful report on conditions in Mesopotamia, 491; severely censured, 492.
- HEADLAM, GENERAL**, Czar and, 973.
- "HEALDTON,"** sinking of the, 990.
- HEALY, TIMOTHY**, 2013.
- HEFFERNAN, COLONEL**, recalled from Ministry of Munitions by War Office, 373-4.
- HENDERSON, ARTHUR**, munitions and, 112; Treasury Agreement and, 178-9; Central Munitions Labour Supply Committee and, 187; takes chair at Glasgow Conference, at Christmas, 1915, 188; recruiting and, 429; supports the Derby Scheme, 435-6; supports conscription, 437; on the undesirability of premature peace, 529-30; invited by Asquith to attend Cabinet meeting from which Lloyd George is excluded, 591; Bonar Law and, 595; ready to serve under Balfour, 599; asks Lloyd George to meet a deputation of the Labour Party, 625; refuses to agree not to serve under Lloyd George, 625; Lloyd George's appreciation of, 627; 628, 632; member of the first War Cabinet, 634; profiteering among ship-owners and, 733; industrial compulsion and, 805, 807; attends Imperial War Cabinet, 1036; dissents from annexation principle, 1037; on disarmament, 1041; sympathetic towards Russian revolutionaries, 1117; drafts telegram to Duma from British Labour, 1118; Anglo-French Labour deputation to Russia and, 1118; proposes to go to Petrograd, 1119; announces that British Labour Party had not yet decided to send deputation to Russia, 1120-1; it is thought undesirable for him to go to Stockholm, 1121; War Cabinet decides that he shall replace Buchanan at Petrograd, 1122; feels himself unable to replace Buchanan, 1123; in favour of allowing MacDonald to

visit Russia, 1124; returns from Russia, 1126; consults with Labour Executives on return from Russia, 1126; decides to go to Paris with Soviet emissaries, 1127; Cabinet discusses his proposed Paris visit, 1127; defies the Cabinet and goes to Paris, 1127-8; has interview with Lloyd George, 1128-9; challenges Cabinet to ask for his resignation, 1129; defends his Paris visit in the House and is also defended by Lloyd George, 1130-1; asks that veto on Stockholm Conference be postponed, 1132; announces himself in favour of Stockholm, 1133; Nabokoff's letter on Stockholm Conference and, 1133-4; supports Stockholm Conference at Labour Conference and then resigns, 1135; objects to restriction of food supplies, 1159; 1523.

ENDERSON, COMMANDER (later Admiral), his work in securing introduction of Convoy system, 687-8; Admiralty examine his findings, 691-2; Gibraltar Convoy and, 693; 708.

ENTIG, CAPTAIN VON, on results of Battle of the Somme, 390.

ERTLING, COUNT, replies on 24/1/18 to speeches of Lloyd George and Wilson announcing Allied War aims, 1495-7; "no annexations" formula and, 1499; deceived as to gravity of situation in August, 1918, 1934; disturbed by breaking of Hindenburg Line, 1936; opposed to democratic reconstruction of Government, 1944; resignation of, 1951; controls composition of new Government, 1959.

HICKMAN, COLONEL, to keep in touch with Moir about inventions, 372.

HICKS-BEACH, SIR M. *See under* Beach, Sir M. Hicks.

IERL, CAPTAIN, on Battle of Somme, 390.

HIGGINSON, the Banker, 1007.

HIGH EXPLOSIVE, War Office does not realise importance of, 76; need for, 121; production of, 342 *et seq.*; Generals dislike, 2039.

HIGH EXPLOSIVES, COMMITTEE OF, Lord Moulton Chairman of, 342.

HILL, DR. L. E., munition workers and, 206.

HINDENBURG, PRESIDENT MARSHAL PAUL VON, strong Eastern proclivities of, 324-5; Verdun and, 325; unable to forecast length of War, 539; 630; on the conduct of Austrians during Brussiloff offensive of 1916, 826; necessity of victory before arrival of Americans and, 1207; prestige of 1223-4; supports Ludendorff's policy about Belgium, 1230; would never agree to disarmament, 1246; on importance of Baghdad, 1455; expresses German war aims in letter of 7/1/18 to the Kaiser, 1494-5; 1497, 1529, 1595; his military clique frustrates Bethmann-Hollweg's attempts to make peace, 1669; a virtual dictator, 1673; 1687; on the weakening of Germany's allies, 1699; his skillful withdrawal in March, 1917, 1702; on curious distribution of British forces in March, 1918, 1706; his description of difficulties of Lys advance, 1767; 1793; on Allied mechanical superiority

in 1918, 1835; on effect of victory at Villers-Cotterets, 1850-1; 1860; on Haig's bad tactics after Amiens success of 8/8/18, 1869; concludes that armistice must be sought, 1881; on Bulgaria's collapse, 1911; decides that War must end, 1920; Italian Front and, 1928; not daunted by defeat, 1934; consents to peace negotiations, 1937; his account of how he was forced to admit defeat, 1944-5; anxious for immediate termination of hostilities, 1952-3; hopes to be able to rescue his Army intact, 1956; Foch on, 1965; not a great leader, 1982; 2002.

HINDENBURG LINE, Germans retreat to, 898; penetration of, 1936.

HINTZE, ADMIRAL VON (German Foreign Secretary), misled by Ludendorff as to peace terms, 1935; attempts to prevent Austria from making a separate peace, 1935; his Austrian mission a failure, 1936; signs decree authorising new constitution, 1940; arranging Hague Conference, 1944; attempts to discover truth concerning military position, 1944; reconstitution of Government and, 1951-2; forms new Government, 1952.

"HIRAMO MARU," sinking of, 1962.

HITLER, ADOLF, 56, 1471, 1982.

HODGE, JOHN, becomes Minister of Labour, 642.

HOETZENDORFF, CONRAD VON, his Italian offensive proposals opposed by Falkenhayn, 861-3; Italy and, 1998.

HOHENZOLLERNS, THE, 1485. *See also* Wilhelm II.

HOLDEN, SIR EDWARD, financial crisis (1914) and, 64, 68.

HOLT, R. D., attacks Corn Production Bill, 766-7.

HOME FRONT, critical importance of, 647, 1141; generals under-rate importance of, 2033.

HOME RULE, IRISH, conscription and, 1599-1600. [*See also under* Ireland.]

HOME RULE ACT (1914), suspension of, 417.

HOMYAKOV, NICHOLAS, his letter to Professor Pares, 962-3.

HOOGE, lessons of advance at, 332.

HOOVER, HERBERT, his proposal for International Food Co-ordination Board put into operation, 796-7; attends a Cabinet meeting on food, 796-7.

HOPKINSON, SIR F. T., at Ministry of Munitions, 150.

HOPWOOD, SIR F. (Lord Southborough), Austrian peace overtures and, 1177-8.

HORNE, GENERAL LORD, *March* (1918) retreat and, 1738; his blunder over Portuguese troops, 1762.

HOTCHKISS GUN, development of, 363.

"HOUSATONIC," sinking of the, 987.

HOUSE, COLONEL E. M., recounts meeting with Lloyd George, 146-7; keenly interested in international affairs, 394; on the

- outcome of War, 395; attempts to make peace, 400; urges Wilson to join Allies, 400-1; submarine warfare and, 401; sinking of *Lusitania* and, 402; peace mission of, 406-8; meets ministers at Reading's house, 411-2; adoption of his peace plan would have brought America into War earlier, 412-3; Bernstorff's letter to, on Wilson's peace note, 664-6; his view of Wilson's peace negotiations, 979; urges Wilson to prepare for War, 981; Bernstorff writes privately to, about Germany's peace terms, 983; Wilson's hesitant attitude and, 989, 990; his warm sympathy with Allies, 992-3; Balfour and, 999; secret treaties and, 999; his tribute to Northcliffe, 1005-6; Northcliffe and, 1006-7; confiscation of ships built to British order and, 1013; Bonar Law and, 1018; British loans and, 1019; Reading and, 1020-1; asked by Wilson to attend Inter-Allied War Council, 1446; head of American Mission, 1565; at Paris Conference of 29/11/17, 1617; invited to bring a Mission to Europe, 1794; Lloyd George's cable of 15/12/17 to, on question of brigading American troops with British and French, 1803-4; 1805; Lloyd George asks him to help hasten arrival of American troops, 1806-7; joint appeal of Balfour and Lloyd George to (25/3/18), 1811-2; to be asked to ensure carrying-out of troop-transport programme, 1818; desirability of his presence in Europe (*May, 1918*), 1825; Austrian armistice and, 1978; Fourteen Points and, 1979.
- HOWARD, SIR ESMÉ, meets Prince Lichnowsky, 519.
- HOWARD, GEOFFREY, 135.
- HOWARD, ROY W., Lloyd George grants interview to, 509-10.
- HOWTH, gun-running at, 33.
- HUGHES, CHARLES EVANS, 414; his attitude to War, 977; financial interests support, 979; loves Germany more than Wilson does, 979.
- HUGHES, GENERAL SAM, Canadian munitions production and, 2009.
- HUGHES, W. M., his protest against American confiscation of ships built to Australian order, 1010; characteristics of, 1034; unable to attend first Imperial War Cabinet, 1034-5; 2010.
- HUMBERT, GENERAL, visits Gough's headquarters, 1734.
- HUNGARY, revolts against her Austro-German Allies, 1920.
- HUNGERFORD MANŒUVRES, lessons of, 79.
- HUNTER, SIR JOHN, at Ministry of Munitions, 150.
- HUSSEIN, SHERIF, takes Mecca, 1075.
- HUTCHISON, GENERAL SIR ROBERT (LORD), goes to National Service Ministry, 812; Director of Organisation, 1727; Pershing's conference with, 1819.
- HUTIER, GENERAL VON, called from Russia to command troops opposite Fifth Army in *March, 1918*, 1704.
- HYNDMAN, H. M., British Labour deputation to Russia and, 1118-9.
- IGNATIEV, GENERAL, 1529.
- ILIFFE, SIR EDWARD (later Lord), at Ministry of Munitions, 151.
- ILLINGWORTH, ALBERT, Labour shortage at ports and, 740-1.
- ILLINGWORTH, PERCY, tragedy of death of, 448.
- IMPERIAL CONFERENCE MOVEMENT, history of, 1029.
- IMPERIAL DEFENCE, COMMITTEE OF, foreign policy and, 28; Anglo-French relations and, 30; Parliament grants emergency powers planned by, 48; not ready for War, 49; financial crisis (1914) and, 62; State insurance of shipping and, 69-70; War Committee of, 213.
- IMPERIAL MUNITIONS BOARD, under chairmanship of Sir Joseph Flavelle, 2009.
- IMPERIAL UNIONIST ASSOCIATION, formation of, 424.
- IMPERIAL WAR CABINET, decision to form, 1027; terms of invitation to Dominion Premiers, 1027-8; personnel of, 1032-4; and composition of, 1035 *et seq.*; matters discussed by, 1036 *et seq.*; Imperial development and, 1041-4; experiment being successful, it is decided to repeat it, 1044; text of Lloyd George's statement to, on military and naval position, 1047-57; agenda of, 1058-61.
- IMPERIAL WAR CONFERENCE, announcement of, 1025; subjects discussed at, 1044-6.
- INDEMNITIES, Balfour on, 529.
- INDEPENDENT WORKERS OF THE WORLD (I.W.W.), activities of, 1148.
- INDIA, part played by, in War, 1024; Imperial War Cabinet and, 1028-30; to be fully represented at future Imperial Conferences (1917), 1044-5; Sir Henry Wilson obsessed with North-West Frontier of, 1864; War effort of, 2005-6.
- INDIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE, Mesopotamia campaign and, 481 *et seq.*
- INDIAN MARINE, incompetence of, 486.
- INDUSTRIAL COUNCILS, JOINT STANDING. *See under* Whitley Councils.
- INDUSTRIAL FATIGUE RESEARCH COMMITTEE, 206.
- INDUSTRIALISTS, REACTIONARY, cause strike in Rochdale, 1149.
- INDUSTRIAL UNREST, COMMISSION ON, Lloyd George announces formation of, 1152; work of, 1156-9. [*See also under* Labour and Strikes.]
- INDUSTRIAL WORKERS, restlessness among in 1914, 1141-2.
- INDUSTRY, COMPULSION IN. *See under* National Service.
- INSURANCE SCHEME, War Risks, bringing into force of, 721-2.
- INTER-ALLIED CONFERENCE, of *December, 1916*, discussion of peace notes at, 660; of



7/8/17, Italian Front and, 1380; of *July*, 1917, Russian position reviewed at, 1530 *et seq.*; of 7/8/17, congratulates provisional Russian Government, 1537; of 30/11/17, Russian position discussed at, 1543-4; of 29/11/17, 1617-21.

**INTER-ALLIED COUNCIL AND PERMANENT ADVISORY GENERAL STAFF**, Lloyd George's decision to set up, 1411; the setting up of, 1437 *et seq.*; final draft for constitution of, 1439-40; Robertson refuses to discuss proposals for, 1440; Lloyd George explains reasons for creation of, at Paris, 1442-4; Lloyd George replies to Asquith's question concerning, 1445; Commons debate on (19/11/17), 1445-8; question of naval representation on, 1446; a completely new departure, 1455. [See also under Supreme War Council.]

**INTER-ALLIED DIPLOMATIC CONFERENCE** of 16/3/18, question of Japanese intervention in Russia and, 1897-8.

**INTER-ALLIED RESERVE**, Supreme Council's plan for, 1629, 1635 *et seq.*; Robertson approves idea of, 1638-9; unanimous agreement concerning, 1640; gives Allies benefit of United Front, 1668; Haig and, 1672; decision to set up made known in *Morning Post*, 1674; need for, 1709; fate of, 1711-2; original plan for, 1712-3; announcement of Haig's refusal to help form, 1715-6; the combined efforts of Haig, Pétain and Clemenceau wreck plans for, 1716-7; Foch's protest against suppression of idea for, 1720; how Foch would have used, 1729-40; Haig's attempt to destroy, 2019; jealousy of Foch on part of Haig and Pétain destroys plans for, 2023; 2028.

**INTERNATIONAL, SECOND**, destruction of, 1119.

**INVASION**, Lloyd George had no fear of, 1585.

**INVERFORTH, LORD**, 623.

**IRELAND**, threat of Civil War in, 33; Britain preoccupied with in *July*, 1914, 128-9; Liquor trade and, 202; part played by problem of in War, 416; Home Rule Act (1914) suspended for duration of War, 417; Insurrection of Easter, 1916, 418; extremists smash settlement of *May*, 1916, 421 *et seq.*; conscription not applied to, 437; Kitchener's prejudices against displayed, 452-3; Lansdowne and conscription of, 516; lack of settlement in, causes trouble in Australia, 1028; recruiting in, 1593; conscription in, 1597-1601; conscription and Home Rule to be simultaneous, 1600; Lloyd George against conscription in, 1599. [See also following entries.]

**IRISH-AMERICANS**, their hatred of England, and reasons for it, 396.

**IRISH CONVENTION**, conscription and, 1599.

**IRISH HOME RULE**, Anglo-American relations and 21-2; Theodore Roosevelt and, 145; 998.

**IRISH NATIONALISTS**, incline to Asquith rather than to Lloyd George, 621; Lloyd George free from commitments to, 633; against Sir Henry Wilson in *February*, 1918, 1688.

**IRONSIDE, SIR H. B.**, Balkans in 1915 and, 236-7.

**ISVOLZKY, BARON** (Russian Ambassador to France), 33; Salonika and, 243; at Paris Conference, 556; welcomes idea of Russian Conference, 561.

**ITALIA IRREDENTA**, Italy's reason for fighting is, 1930.

**ITALIAN FRONT**, French in favour of attack from, 1294; attack from as alternative to Passchendaele, 1302-3; in 1917, 1372-1404; lack of heavy artillery ends offensive, 1376; Allied generals decide to abandon proposal for attack on, 1382; Lloyd George visits, 1391; quality of Italian soldiers, 1392; incompetence of Italian G.H.Q., 1399; King of Italy on reasons for Caporetto disaster, 1401-2; necessity of holding Piave line, 1402; French and British generals not anxious for success on, 1406-7; Inter-Allied Council and, 1441; Robertson's views of, in *June*, 1917, 1461-3; Haig's reasons for preferring Passchendaele to 1464-6; in 1918, 1470; Clemenceau and, 1618-9; Italian generals lukewarm about offensive on, 1618-19; proposals for reorganisation of Italian Army, 1634; Lloyd George suggests Western Front reinforcements from, 1661-2; proposal to reinforce Western front from, 1664; troops not sent from, till 21/3/18, 1665; neglect of, 1927; Italians refuse to attack, 1928; Italians, having been at last induced to fight, win Vittorio Veneto with British help, 1929; Allies miss chances on, 2001-2; Haig and, 2029-30. [See also Cadorna, Caporetto and next entry.]

**ITALY**, demands financial assistance from Allies, 564; financial straits of, 571; Austria unwilling to make any concessions to, 1182 *et seq.*; attack from, as alternative to Flanders offensive, 1285 *et seq.*; had done no heavy fighting before *June*, 1917, 1286; Smuts and Mensdorff discuss future of, 1484-5; Mensdorff on her baseness, 1489.

**ITALY, KING OF**. See under Victor Emmanuel III.

**IVANOFF, GENERAL**, on cartridge shortage in Russia, 266; on rifle shortage in Russia, 267; in plot to depose Czar, 958.

**IVEAGH, LORD**, 384.

**I.W.W** See under Independent Workers of the World.

**IZZET PASHA**, sends General Townshend as his emissary to British, 1975-6.

**JACKSON, ADMIRAL SIR HENRY**, Convoy system and, 678.

**JACKSON, HUTH**, financial crisis (1914) and, 64; his Sub-Committee of Committee of Imperial Defence, and War Risks Insurance and, 721-2.

**JACKSON, BRIGADIER-GENERAL L. C.**, at Ministry of Munitions, 163.

**JACKSON, STONEWALL**, 2014-5.

**JACKSON, SIR THOMAS**, inconclusive on Convoy system, 680.

**JAGOW, VON** (German Secretary for Foreign Affairs), Kaiser's letter of 28/7/14, to, 37, 45.

**JAPAN**, in control of German Pacific Islands, 501; Ludendorff on her possible alliance with Germany, 1227; grows rich and powerful while Europe tears herself to pieces, 1485; anxious to intervene in Russia, 1896-7; her comparative uselessness in the War, 1897; her alleged disinterestedness, 1898-9; advises British to support Semenoff, 1902; American distrust of her anxiety to intervene in Russia, 1902-3; to be asked to assist in transporting Czechs, 1903; lands 70,000 men in Vladivostok, 1908.

**JAURES, JEAN L.**, Clemenceau's admiration for, 1603.

**JELlicoe, ADMIRAL SIR JOHN R.** (later Earl), on the submarine menace, 576-7; made First Sea Lord, 592; his memorandum of *October, 1916*, on shipping position, 673; timidity of, 675; disapproves of Convoy system, 678 *et seq.*; in favour of arming merchantmen, 679; his floating intelligence service, 681; after meeting Lloyd George and Carson agrees to experiments with Convoys, 685-7; Maclay and, 688; his memorandum on submarine menace and food supply, 690-1; changes his mind about Convoys, 692-3; Gibraltar Convoy and, 693; his grudging spirit about Convoys, 694; his contempt for junior officers and his disbelief in offensive power of the Navy, 698-9; antagonism between Beatty and, 700; removed from position of First Sea Lord, 701; discusses protection of merchantmen and supports policy of arming them, 714-5; on prompt action of Government in matter of arming merchantmen, 715-6; takes German estimate of the outcome of submarine warfare, 920; on American naval co-operation, 996; Imperial War Cabinet and, 1036; Admiralty Air Board dispute and, 1101; 1126; question of military advance along Flemish coast and, 1251; supports Haig, 1267; supports Flanders offensive plan, 1279, 1292; 1796.

**JENA, BATTLE OF**, 526.

**JERUSALEM**, effect of Allenby's capture of, 1091-2.

**JEUDWINE, GENERAL**, at Givenchy, 1762.

**JEWS**, incompetence in Czarist Russia attributed to malevolence on part of, 265-6; Balfour Declaration and, 349; regarded with suspicion in Russia, 963; capture of Jerusalem and, 1092.

**JILLINSKI, GENERAL**. See under Gillinski, General.

**JOFFRE, MARSHAL**, his ideas on German strategy, 51; 86; Gallieni and, 228-9; Salonika and, 235; believes he can force German lines in 1915, 240; insists on French control of War on land, 241; Balkans and, 242-5; Kitchener opposed to, on subject of offensive in *September, 1915*, 290; defeated in Champagne, so turns to Salonika, 292; German contempt for, 294; stubbornly persists in offensive of *September, 1915*, 295; Serbian collapse and, 295

*et seq.*; states objectives in *October, 1915*, 296-7; discusses position in Salonika, 306; hesitant over Salonika policy, 318; his reputation diminished, 318-9; visits London (*June, 1916*) to discuss Salonika, 319 *et seq.*; eloquently urges Salonika offensive, 319; glad to turn from Salonika to Somme, 321; Lloyd George meets him on Somme Front, 322; no able advisers for, 323; in accuracy of his forecast of German strategy nearly proves fatal, 455; Robertson disapproves of, 469; refuses to postpone Chantilly Conference, 544; co-ordination between Allies and, 554; at Chantilly Conference, 568; replies to Lloyd George on question of effectives in Salonika, 569-71; plans to go no further than Monastir, 572; his excuses for inaction in Balkans, 573; fall of, 819; demands troops for Salonika, 821; pressed by Britain to reinforce French Army in Salonika, 822; fighting politicians, 823; his refusal to accept unpalatable facts, 831; his miscalculations at Verdun, and in *August, 1914*, 831-2; on Sarraill's incompetence, 846; his strategical principle, 866; for two and a half years dictator of France, 868; his fall due to Verdun, Somme and the fate of Roumania, 868; his qualities and defects, 868-71; hopes raised by his removal, 873; his removal causes no change in strategy, 874; understanding the temper of his countrymen, would not have advised a second Somme offensive, 874-5; his request for two divisions in Salonika, 885; a planomaniac, 901; in America, 998; 1247; Robertson's letter of 1/12/16 to, 1250-1; his hopeless offensives, 1259; French inferiority in heavy guns and, 1263; 1316; narrowness of his outlook, 1409-10; not much worse than Nivelle, 1411; makes ineffectual attempt to achieve some sort of Unity of Command, 1432; 1453; almost establishes a military dictatorship, 1684; always optimistic, 1867; Balkans and, 1999; convinced of success at Champagne and Artois, 2035.

**JOHNSON, H. W.** (American politician), returned to Senate, 979.

**JONES, TOWYN**, made Junior Lord of the Treasury with Baldwin, 642.

**JOURNALISTS**, under thumb of G.H.Q., 1318, 1365.

**JOWETT, F. W.**, sailors refuse to take him to Russia, 1125.

**JUDENITCH, GENERAL**, his Army disintegrates, 1908.

**JUTLAND, BATTLE OF**, Balfour's report of, 597; 675; Beatty-Jellicoe disagreements and, 700; 1457, 2042.

**KABISCH, LIEUTENANT-GENERAL**, pays tribute to British troops, 1756.

**KALEDIN, GENERAL**, one of the best Russian commanders, 1538; British not justified in backing, 1540; proposal that Allies should support, 1542; 1554.

**KAMAL BEY**, 1505.

**KARAGEGEVITCH DYNASTY** in Serbia, 1483.

**KARL, EMPEROR OF AUSTRIA**, shows desire for peace, 1175-6; sincerely desirous of opening negotiations, 1178; enters into negotiations with Sixte, 1178-9; his remarks on Count Czernin's note, 1180-1; visited by Sixte at Vienna, 1181-2; his letter of 24/3/17 to Sixte, 1182-4; insists on secrecy in peace negotiations, 1184; French reply to his letter, 1190; makes fresh offers of peace, 1190-1; record of his verbal message, 1191-3; again interviews Sixte and hands him a second letter, 1194; text of second letter, 1197; his melancholy fate, 1204; 1231.

**KAVALLA**, Constantine hands it over to Germans, 317-8.

**KELLAWAY, F.**, Liberal Party canvass and, 620.

**KEMMEL HILL**, Germans capture, 1769, 1842.

**KEMP, ADMIRAL**, Murmansk Soviet seeks help of, 1893; repels Finnish attack on Pechenga, 1894.

**KENWORTHY, LIEUTENANT - COMMANDER** (later Lord Strabolgi), how he helped Lloyd George, 697-8.

**KEOGH, SIR ALFRED**, on Indian Army's medical service, 488.

**KEPPEL, SIR DEREK**, 790.

**KERENSKY, A. F.**, head of Provisional Government in Russia, 950; a moderate Socialist, 955; Czar and, 974; partially controls Duma, 1117; British Labour deputation to Russia and, 1118-9; supported by the Soviet, 1122; 1124; supports revival of Stockholm Conference, 1126; his limitations, 1126-7; forms Coalition, 1132; no longer an ardent supporter of Stockholm Conference, 1133, 1134-5; desires that it should not take place, 1136; his difficulties with Soviet, 1139; attempts to make Russian Army continue the War, 1453; incapacity of, 1519; fighting with Miliukoff, 1519; his nervousness, 1521; 1523; refused a hearing by soldiers, 1526-7; attempts to restore discipline in Army, 1527; not very interested in the War, 1528-9; loses control of situation, 1530; attempt to arrest, 1532-3; does not understand necessity of discipline, 1536; agrees to give Korniloff a free hand, 1536; Allies congratulate, 1537; afraid of shedding blood, 1538; quarrels with Korniloff, 1538-9; urged by British to come to terms with Korniloff, 1539; his view of Korniloff affair, 1539-40; his Government overthrown by Lenin and Trotsky, 1540; kept the Germans in suspense, thereby materially assisting the Allies, 1543; the nature of his deception of himself and others, 1886; attempts to secure Allied help against Bolsheviks, 1901-6 only the mouthpiece of disgruntled Socialists, 1904.

**KERR, PHILIP** (later Lord Lothian), secretary to Lloyd George, 643; Imperial War Cabinet and, 1032; accompanies Smuts to Switzerland to discuss peace terms with Count Mensdorff, 1478; Turkish peace terms and, 1490; discusses peace terms with Smuts and Skrzynski, 1500-2; his telegram from Berne

on possibility of making peace with Austria, 1500-1; his notes of an interview with Dr. Parodi in *December, 1917*, 1504-9; interviews Kerensky, 1905.

**KEYES, REAR-ADMIRAL SIR ROGER**, Chairman of "Channel Barrage Committee," 700-1; replaces Bacon at Dover, 701; 2042.

**KEYNES, J. M.**, dismal financial views of, 408-10; Law and, 612.

**KIDERLEN-WAECHTER, ALFRED VON** (German Foreign Secretary), Agadir incident and, 25, 27.

**KIGGELL, GENERAL L. E.**, tells Plumer of C.H.Q.'s Belgian coast objective, 1253-4; his complacent optimism about Passchendaele, 1316; dismissed, 1370, 1724.

**KIPLING, RUDYARD**, 1909.

**KIRKWOOD, DAVID**, Lloyd George's first meeting with, 187-8; at Glasgow Conference, Christmas, 1915, 188.

**KITCHENER, FIELD-MARSHAL LORD**, on German Army, 38; 50; his attitude to the Cabinet, 51; Joffre's strategy and, 51-2; Cabinet kept in ignorance by, 52; sent to France for information, 52; the value of his personality in aiding recruiting, 75; military inexperience of, 76; replies to French's request for shells, 86-7; opposes formation of Cabinet Committee on Munitions, 87-8; on probable duration of War, 97; his memorandum on ammunition shortage, 99-100; 102; rifle shortage and, 102-3; Labour troubles and, 104; shell shortage and, 105; Munitions of War Committee and, 107 *et seq.*; Armaments Output Committee and, 111; explanation of his frugality in ammunition, 114-5; warns Lords of munition crisis, 115; informs Asquith that shells are abundant (14/4/15), 116; anti-gas appliances and, 119; Northcliffe's attack on, 123; his popularity as War Director, 130; his political leanings, 130; General Staff and, 137-8; Dardanelles and, 139; his attitude to Ministry of Munitions, 144; Sir P. Girouard and, 152; Armaments Output Committee and, 163; obstructs work of Ministry of Munitions, 171; objects to release of pivotal men from Army, 173; Labour shortage and, 180-3; the drink question and, 195-6; munitions for Russia and, 212; approves Lloyd George's memorandum of 1/1/15 on strategy, 227; his letter of 2/1/15 to Sir John French, 227-8; 230; refuses military support for Dardanelles campaign, 232-3; fears German invasion, 232; regards Territorials with contempt, 232-3; won over to Dardanelles plan by Churchill, 234-5; Salonika and, 235; Serbian question and, 238-40; advocates central control of strategy, 240; Balkans and, 243-4; 247; Dardanelles and, 249; Eastern Front and, 251-2, 254; Paget's Balkan report and, 256; replies to Lloyd George's memorandum of 22/2/15 on Balkan question, 257 *et seq.*; on the alternative roads to victory, 258; on Labour and munition difficulties, 258-9; Russian situation and, 264-5; his help invoked by Russia, 267; shares Lloyd George's dissatisfaction with Allied strategy (1915), 285; doubts



- wisdom of offensive of *September, 1915*, 289, 292; keeps Cabinet in ignorance of military events, 290; Serbian collapse and, 295; his calculations upset by Serbian collapse, 296; goes to the Mediterranean, 298-9; decline of his prestige, 299; Balkans and, 305; warned that Germans might advance on Constantinople, 309; neglects to make preparations for a landing at Salonika, 309; ignorant of the attack on Serbia, 310; Beresford on blunders of, 313; holds popular imagination despite blunders, 314; accused by the French of making secret arrangements to evacuate Salonika, 314; goes to Calais to discuss Salonika evacuation, 315; announces German demand for withdrawal from Salonika, 315; visits Paris and arranges not to evacuate Salonika, 316; objects to Somme offensive (*June, 1916*) but is overruled, 319; French's appeals to on munitions, 328; Lloyd George's "Big Gun Programme" and, 333 *et seq.*; Geddes's interview with, about machine-guns, 359-62; agreeable that Ministry of Munitions should take over inventions, 370; control of inventions and, 372 *et seq.*; fails hopelessly as regards safety of the troops, 376; returns from Mediterranean, 378; at the Hatfield tank trial, 383-4; scared by the Treasury, 410; his tactlessness in dealing with Irish regiments, 417; decides to visit Russia, 420; his aims in man-power sphere, 431; calls for conscription, 432-3; his *October 1915*, memorandum on "Recruiting for the Army," 433; conflicting estimates of, 450; fixed mentality of, 450; his contempt for democracy, 451; his attitude to Irish and Welsh divisions, 452-3; possessed a sense of humour, 453-4; takes long view of War, 454; accuracy of his forecast of German strategy, 455; loses authority, 455; crushing effect of his death, 455-6; humiliating conditions under which he had to work, 457; his Russian mission, 461; Robertson and, 469; rejects suggestion that Geddes should report on transport problems, 471; Cowans and, 495-6; false prophecies of, 545; fails to deal with transport in Balkans, 573-4; Robertson's supplanting of, 581; work of Haldane and, 603; Carson critical of, 608; trusts in attrition, 617; his view of Runciman, 639; his indifference to Serbian situation, 831; his hold on public confidence, 871; his projected visit to Russia, 937; air defence and, 1096; approves Kurzon's Air Board suggestion, 1098; Balkans and, 2000; Haig, Robertson and Esher intrigue against, 2018; 2024; 2031; against Champagne offensive. 2035.
- KLEBOVSKI, GENERAL**, 1528.
- KLUCK, ALEXANDER VON**, his strategy in *August, 1914*, 831-2; at first Battle of the Marne, 832; 846.
- "**KNOCK-OUT BLOW**" interview given by Lloyd George, 509 *et seq.*
- KNOX, GENERAL**, on Russian lack of heavy guns, 270; reports on Russian situation, 941; Russian munition supplies and, 961; his view of Russian situation, 1522; describes condition of Russian Army, 1526-30; Russia in *September, 1917*, and, 1537-8; reports that Russian Army will not continue to fight, 1540; 1554; advises dispatch of 5,000 men to Archangel, 1893; as an anti-Bolshevik, objected to by President Wilson, 1906; not a politician, 1907; in Siberia, 1908.
- KONOVALOFF**, Russian Minister of Commerce, 1522.
- KORNILOFF, L. G.**, nearly succeeds in establishing a military dictatorship, 1519; 1529; reinstated as Commander-in-Chief of Russian Armies, 1536; supported by Cossacks, 1538; his rebellion and fall, 1538-9.
- KOVEL**, effect of unsuccessful Russian attacks on, 464.
- KOVNO**, effect of fall of, 293.
- KRILENKO, ENSIGN**, 1529; Russian armistice agreements and, 1548.
- KRUPENSKI, P. N.**, Duma and, 966; 968.
- KUHL, GENERAL VON**, his report on American troops, 1475; on Spring offensive, 1918, 1835; on German man-power deficiency, 1838; his view of reasons for failure of last German offensive, 1850; 1859; on exhaustion of German Army, 1872; on Bolshevism in German ranks, 1872, 1873; on effect of tanks, 1874-5; on German losses in *October, 1918*, 1881; on Germany's need of Russia's wealth, 1889-90; on effects of loss of Roumania, 1920-1; 2002.
- KUHLMANN, BARON VON**, 1220; his attempts to make peace, 1231 *et seq.*; Balfour's attitude to his peace move, 1237-40; supposed terms of peace suggested by, 1241; his attitude to Alsace-Lorraine, 1244-5; dare not offer to restore Belgium, 1245; 1313; 1316-7; "no annexations" formula and, 1499; silenced by War Lords, 1594; dismissal of, 1931.
- KURNA**, capture of, 481.
- KUT**, capture of, 482; fall of, 482-3; cause of failure to relieve, 486-7; recaptured, 1077.
- LABOUR**, emergency regulation of, 1144-5; conferences with, about man-power, 1593-7; in favour of conscripting Ireland, 1598; ungrudging service of, in 1918, 1773-4.
- LABOUR, MINISTRY OF**, Lloyd George proposes formation of, 627-8.
- LABOUR, PROBLEM OF**, Ministry of Munitions and, 171 *et seq.*; agriculture and, 769-70.
- "**LABOUR LEADER**," 1153.
- LABOUR LEADERS**, proclaim industrial truce in 1914, 1142.
- LABOUR NEWSPAPERS**, 1679.
- LABOUR PARTY**, War and, 131; drink trade and, 199; opposes National Registration Bill, 430; minority of, condemns conscription, 437; majority of, hostile to Lloyd George, 596; partly pacifist, 621; Lloyd George considering their support essential, endeavours to induce them to join the Coalition, 624 *et seq.*; leaders of, discuss Government policy with Lloyd George, 625 *et seq.*; decides to join second Coalition, 632; industrial compulsion and, 805; to

send second deputation to Russia, 1119; suggests Inter-Allied Socialist Conference in London, 1121; at 1917 Conference declares itself in favour of supporting Government, 1151; peace-terms resolution of, 1215; pacifist section of, attacks idea of Inter-Allied Council, 1441; peace proposals of, 1491; war aims of, 1510; its delegates in Russia attacked as emissaries of the Government, 1521. [See also under Socialist.]

**LABOUR PARTY, INDEPENDENT**, with Ramsay MacDonald as its leading light, creates friction between Russians and British Labour delegates, 1118-9; strong Russian desire to interview members of, 1125; "Rank and file" movement and, 1148; revolutionary activities of, 1153; Leeds Conference and, 1153.

**LABOUR SHORTAGE**, causes of (1914-18), 172; steps necessary to abolish, 172-3.

**LABOUR, SOCIALISTIC AND DEMOCRATIC CONFERENCE** at Leeds (*June, 1917*), 1123-4.

**LABOUR UNREST**, problem of, 1141 *et seq.*; exists in all belligerent countries, 1206.

**LACAZE, ADMIRAL**, at Paris Conference, 556; on Salonika, 569; on Nivelle's attitude to Haig, 897.

**LACONIA**, "sinking of, 989.

**LAFAYETTE, MARQUIS DE**, 1014.

**LA FOLLETTE, SENATOR ROBERT M.**, blocks passage of Bill concerning arming of merchantmen, 987-8.

**LAMBERT, G.**, questions Lloyd George on Versailles decisions, 1683; man-power estimates and, 1785.

**LANKEN, BARON**, Kuhlmann peace moves and, 1232, 1234-6; approaches French with peace proposals, 1241.

**LAND**, Lloyd George proposes that every arable acre be used for food, 629-30. [See also *Agriculture and Food*.]

**LANDWEHR, GENERAL** (Austrian General of Supplies), on food shortage in Austria, 1473.

**LANG & SONS, JOHNSTONE, MESSRS.**, labour shortage and, 185.

**LANDSDOWNE, LORD**, 22; disinterestedness of in 1914, 130; Fisher's resignation and, 137; his obstructionist tactics on the Irish question, 423-4; uneasy about Allied prospects, 508; his memorandum of *November, 1916*, expressing doubts as to possibility of victory, 514-20; 539; a member of the ruling class, 610; more respected than followed, 622; declines to join Lloyd George's Government, 641; 652; his judgment influenced by Runciman's pessimism, 723; Corn Production Bill and, 768; his courage in making peace proposals, 1206; effect of his peace move in Germany, 1208, 1476; in favour of peace on any honourable and safe terms, 1491; opposes Irish conscription, 1600.

**LANDSDOWNE TREATY**, Morocco and, 25; 30.

**LAUSING, ROBERT**, receives announcement of unrestricted submarine warfare, 982;

announces beginning of armed neutrality, 989; ignorant of President Wilson's intentions, 990; Wilson's reply to Vatican peace note signed by, 1222; 1956, 1957.

**LARKIN, JAMES**, organises strikes in America, 1016.

**LAURIER, SIR WILFRID**, does not permit Party considerations to interfere with prosecution of War, 1023.

**LAW, BONAR**, considerations to be borne in mind in reading Lloyd George's estimates of, 55; third War Loan and, 74; his comments on Defence of the Realm Act (third edition), 106-7; shell shortage and, 119; his disinterestedness, in 1914, 130-1; Fisher's resignation and, 135-6; formation of Coalition and, 136 *et seq.*; Salonika and, 297-8; considers resignation because of deception of Serbia, 307; agrees with Lloyd George on Salonika, 315; sceptical of Keynes, 410; recruiting and, 429; Lloyd George never conscious of his Party associations, 449; urges Lloyd George to go to War Office, 460-1; Lloyd George decides to sound him on question of War Committee, 575; Lloyd George considers his co-operation vital, 585; his view of Asquith, 586; Beaverbrook partial to, 586; Lloyd George's letter of 2/12/16 to, 589; Asquith tells him of "complete agreement" between Lloyd George and himself, 589; asked to form an administration but declines when Asquith refuses to serve under him and urges the King to send for Lloyd George, 596; Lloyd George's absolute confidence in, 596; friendship between Lloyd George and, 598; decides, with Lloyd George, not to enter into personal controversy about matters relative to the formation of Coalition, 598; Asquith and, 599; a poor speaker, 605-6; afraid of Carson's tongue, 609; Lloyd George's respect and affection for, 610-1; of lowly origin, 610; a great gulf fixed between Asquith and 611-2; pessimism and courage of, 612-3; his friendship with Beaverbrook, 613; tragic bereavements of, 613-4; dislikes music, scenery and women, but likes bridge and tobacco, 614-5; Asquithians anticipate his serving under Lloyd George, 621; his influence among Tories, 622; his loyalty to his Party colleagues, 623-4; 626; secures adherence of doubtful Tories, 632; a member of the first War Cabinet and leader of the House, 634; refuses to have Churchill in the second Coalition, 636; Convoy system and, 678; 684; anxious to remove Carson from the Admiralty without hurting his feelings, 700; agrees to removal of Jellicoe, 701; approves selection of Maclay as Shipping Controller, 726; terms of his message of congratulation to Russian Provisional Government, 969; his references to Czar cause unfriendliness in Russia, 971; unable to go to America, 1018; at Imperial War Cabinet, 1036; Air Ministry and, 1113; Henderson's Paris trip and, 1128; Stockholm Conference and, 1132-4; his statement to House on electoral reform, 1168; on the Lords and



- the Electoral Reform Bill, 1173; refuses a patched-up peace, 1213-4; his letter of 21/9/17 to Lloyd George, 1240; not a strict "Westerner," 1251; sceptical about Passchendaele plan, 1277; opposes Haig's Flanders offensive plans, 1292; Lloyd George's letter of 27/8/17 to, on Italian Front, 1386-7; question of Irish conscription and, 1597; Irish Home Rule and, 1600; 1685; likes Sir Henry Wilson, 1688; 1690; his statements condemned as inaccurate by Sir F. Maurice, 1784-5; refrains from any allusion to Maurice intrigue in 1918 election, 1786; demands inquiry into Maurice's allegations, 1787; on Foch's armistice terms, 1956; on Haig's armistice terms, 1970; question of continuing the blockade and, 1971; approves of Wilson's last note to Germany, 1972; reason why he agreed to Passchendaele plan, 2037.
- LAWRENCE, SIR HERBERT**, Haig's Chief of Staff, 1576; question of deposing, 1672; totally unfitted for position of C.G.S., 1724; 1725; his inability to comprehend situation in *March*, 1918, 1733; 1735; does not want Foch to command Allied Armies, 1744; 2023-4.
- LAWRENCE, T. E.**, his military successes against Turks, 1076-7.
- LAWRENCE'S (LADY) Munition Makers' Canteen Committee**, 204.
- LAYTON, SIR WALTER**, at Ministry of Munitions, 151, 167; shell production and, 389; at Petrograd Conference, 931; foresees the Revolution, 942; member of British Mission to America, 997.
- LEAGUE OF NATIONS**, Balfour's forecast of, 664; discussed by Imperial War Cabinet, 1037-41; Czernin's support for idea of, 1481; essential conditions for, 1481-2; 1518; 1942; the only hope of averting further wars, 1986.
- LECHNISKY, GENERAL**, his offensives not decisive, 558.
- LEE, COLONEL SIR ARTHUR** (later Lord Lee of Fareham), assists Lloyd George at Ministry of Munitions, 346-7; visits scene of Hayes explosion, 353; machine-guns and, 362; Du Cane writes to, about War Office, 375-6; Roosevelt's letter of 10/11/16 to, 414-5; Roosevelt praises Lloyd George in letters to, 445-6; brings Carson and Lloyd George together, 586; 623; appointed Director-General of Food Production Department, 762-3; proposals for 1918 Agricultural Campaign and, 777; on success of wheat production drive, 780-1; resigns because of opposition to his 1919 programme, 785.
- LEE, HIGGINSON** (Bankers), 1007.
- LEEDS**, shell factory at, 164.
- LEEPER, MR.**, acts as intermediary between Russia and England, 1552, 1553.
- "LEINSTER,"** sinking of, 1962.
- LENIN**, 56; a refugee when Revolution broke out, 953; the exploiter, not the originator, of the Revolution, 955; opposes Russian participation in Stockholm Conference, 1119; despises Kerensky, 1126; directed Russia into an amazing Reformation, 1519; his strength, 1519; Sir George Buchanan's references to, in *April*, 1917, 1520; represents small minority of workers and peasants, 1522; his arrival in Russia in *April*, 1917, 1522; ruthless directness of, 1535; seizes power, 1540; the limits of his rule, 1541; Germany accepts his offer of an armistice, 1542; concerned, not about democratic government, but about the emancipation of the worker, 1885-6; one of the greatest leaders of men ever thrown up in any epoch, 1886; concedes to Germany the exploitation of the Caspian oil fields, 1892; Kerensky seeks Allied help against, 1904-6.
- LESLIE, SIR NORMAN**, Convoy system and, 688; 692; shipping and, 735.
- LETTOW-VORBECK, GENERAL VON**, Smuts fights, 1032, 1576; rout of, 2009.
- LEVER, SIR HARDMAN**, at Ministry of Munitions, 150; Spring-Rice and, 1003; American loans and, 1015, 1018.
- LEWIS, FREDERICK**, shipping control and, 727.
- LEWIS, SIR HERBERT**, introduces Kenworthy to Lloyd George, 698.
- LEWIS GUNS**, fresh orders for, 362-3.
- LIAPCHEF, ANDRE**, Bulgarian armistice and, 1947.
- "LIBERAL MAGAZINE,"** supports War, 444.
- LIBERAL PARTY**, French sympathies of, 2; reluctant to enter War, 130; advantages accruing from supremacy of, in 1914, 131; Lloyd George's attitude to conscription alienates a section of, 440-1; disintegration of, 444 *et seq.*; growth of anti-War feeling in, 444; growing dislike of Lloyd George in, 445; War always fatal to, 448-9; half of members opposed to Lloyd George, 596; its leaders hostile to Lloyd George, 598; campaign of misrepresentation of Lloyd George in, 598-600; half of members support Lloyd George, 620-21; its leaders hold aloof from Coalition, 635; Cowdray's resignation helps to destroy, 1112-3; disruptive effect of *March*, 1918, defeat on, 1778.
- LICHNOWSKY, PRINCE**, declaration of War and, 45; Sir E. Howard meets, 519.
- LIDDELL, SIR FRANCIS**, educational reform and, 1994.
- LINCOLN, ABRAHAM**, 439; 602; 658-9; respected in England, 999; compared with Wilson, 1009; his difficulties with military mind, 1823; essential difference between Wilson and, 1831.
- LIQUOR TRADE**, Central Control Board for, 201; "no treating" order and, 201; defeat of proposals for higher taxation of, 202; Food Controller and control of, 202; Carlisle experiment in State control of, 203; Canteens Committee and, 203; work of voluntary organisations in control of, 204; Finance Committee of, 208; Devonport's suggestion for control of, 791-2; State purchase of, considered, 791-2. [*See also* Brewing and Drink.]



ITVINOFF, MAXIM M., his revolutionary activities while in England, 1541; appointed Bolshevik representative in London, 1552; 1553.

LIVERPOOL POST," 460.

LEWELLYN, SIR L. W., at Ministry of Munitions, 151.

LOYD, RICHARD, advises Lloyd George not to leave the Treasury, 144.

OCKHART, BRUCE, British representative in Petrograd, 1554; Lloyd George's high opinion of, 1555; Balfour's despatch to, 1555; had urged the British Government to remain friendly with Bolsheviks, 1557; attempts to induce Soviets to invite Allied intervention, 1902.

ODGE, SENATOR H. C., 446; opposes Wilson on arming of merchantmen, 714.

ONDON TREATY OF (4/9/14), Russia and, 1544.

ONDON CONVENTION, Grey's proposed, 59.

ONDONDERRY, SIXTH MARQUESS OF, opposes idea of Party truce (1910), 22.

ONDONDERRY, SEVENTH MARQUESS OF, opposes introduction of Irish conscription, 1600.

ONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS, welfare work in industry and, 208.

ONG, WALTER, 22; drafts a Bill for a National Register, 430; Conscription Bill introduced by, 439; his influence among Tories, 622; 624; Colonial Secretary, 642; jealous of Carson, 699; makes a determined attack on Corn Production Bill, 767-9; Imperial War Cabinet and, 1026; attends Imperial War Conference, 1036; presides over Imperial War Conference, 1044; protests against inclusion of Smuts in War Cabinet, 1089; introduces Elections and Registration Act, 1164; proposes that Special Register Bill be dropped, 1165.

ONGHOPE CONFERENCE ON NORWEGIAN SHIPPING, in favour of Convoys, 689.

OOS, failure of offensive at, 290; 294; machine-guns at, 362; 369-70; Battle of 1732.

LORD GREY AND THE WORLD WAR" (Lutz), 37.

ORDS, HOUSE OF, reform of, 21; Bonar Law on its attitude to Electoral Reform, 1173.

OREBURN, LORD, foreign policy of, 28.

ORRAINE, French retreat in, 52. [See also under Alsace and Lorraine.]

OUCHEUR, LOUIS, 1737.

OUKOF, E. T., Bulgarian armistice and, 1947.

OVAT, LORD, controls Canadian lumbermen in France, 752.

OWTHER, J. W., his conference on Franchise and Electoral Reform, 1166-7.

UCAS, LORD, 88.

UDENDORFF, GENERAL ERICH VON, on the advantages of Roumania's fall, 820; on the weakness of the Turks at end of 1916, 826; on failure of Allies to save Roumania, 868;

his testimony to Nivelles's choice of front, 889-90; his account of discovery of Nivelles plan, 898-9; on the Battle of Arras, 902-3; 991; demands a peace of victory, 1211; considers Vatican peace note and sets out military demands, 1223-8; Hindenburg supports his policy, 1230; intoxicated with power, 1243; his attitude to Kuhlmann's peace moves, 1246; would never agree to disarmament, 1246; 1264; suffers some initial anxiety about Passchendaele offensive, 1312; later stages of Passchendaele do not perturb, 1320; 1324; 1331; 1368; Austrian food shortage and, 1473; owing to transport shortage, allows Allies time to reform, 1474; encouraged by British pacifists, 1476; 1494; urges a "peace offensive," 1053; 1542; decides to stage his 1918 spring offensive, 1634; his evidence shows that the Germans realised how much the English military clique weakened Allies, 1669; frustrates Bethmann-Hollweg's attempts to make peace, 1669; according to Delbrück, Lloyd George had a better military understanding than, 1676; 1687; his programme for spring offensive, 1918, 1698; 1705; attributes Haig's method of distributing his reserves to ignorance, 1706; unable to understand stupidity of British strategy, 1706; Sir Herbert Lawrence becomes his opposite number, 1724; Foch's ideas of his strategy, 1729; on offensive of March, 1918, 1754; 1759; launches "Georgette" attack, 1760; trapped by his own strategy, 1765-6; Foch and, 1768; his blunders at Lys, 1771; suffers from lack of reserves, 1772; complains of man-power shortage, 1779; 1793; loses last chance of victory, 1834; on importance of defeating British, 1836; Aisne attack and, 1837; his success in May, 1918, 1842; forced to abandon Montdidier-Noyon attack, 1845; plans Champagne attack, 1846; caught unawares by Foch's attack from Villers-Cotterets, 1849; withdraws to line of the Vesle, 1850; realises that War is over, 1851; unable to adopt offensive, 1852; on effect of Champagne reverse, 1859; defeat of Bulgaria compels him to appeal for armistice, 1864; 1866; on Haig's failure to follow up his victory of 8/8/18 at Amiens, 1869; admits that Amiens battle of 8/8/18 was the death-blow to German hopes, 1870-1; asks that boys of 18 should be sent to field depots on Western Front, 1872; unimpressed by first tanks, 1874; obsessed with man-power question, 1875-6; on crushing effect of Haig's attack on Siegfried Line, 1880; concludes that armistice must be sought, 1881; sums up position on 30/9/18, 1881; resigns, 1884; food-shortage and, 1889; hopes to raise soldiers in Russia, 1891; on Czech troops, 1900-1; on Bulgaria's collapse, 1911; attempts to reinforce Bulgaria, 1919; instructs German Foreign Secretary to take steps to bring about an armistice, 1920; recommends "peace offensive," 1931-2; will not hear of restoration of Belgium, 1933; unable to face the fact of defeat, 1933-5; insists on impossible peace terms, 1935; confident of repulsing Allied advance of August, 1918,

- 1935, 1936; his hopes prove vain, 1936; finally convinced that the end is in sight, 1944-6; demands immediate armistice, 1951; hopes to rescue his troops before they are completely destroyed, 1956; is behind German peace note, 1959; consulted by Prince Max, 1964; his hopes of an armistice, 1964, nation loses faith in, 1965; his attitude to Wilson's note, 1965; seems not to realise the hopelessness of situation, 1966; dismissal of, 1967; succeeded by Groener, 1980; not a great leader, 1982; 2002, 2007: turns defeat into victory at Cambrai, 2029.
- "**LUDENDORFF'S SELBSTPORTRÄT**," 1676.
- LUDWIG, EMIL**, his nonsensical ascription of pacifist qualities to the London mob (*August, 1914*), 40-1.
- LUFTI BEY FIKRI**, 1505.
- LUMSDEN, CAPTAIN**, ineffectuality of, 486.
- "**LUSITANIA**," sinking of the, 400.
- LVOFF, PRINCE**, his interview with Milner, 944-6; a constitutional monarchist, 955; Lloyd George's message to, when he became Russian Premier, 970-1; the Czar and, 976; could not have directed the Revolution, 1519; attempts to arrest, 1533; 1535.
- LYAUTEY, GENERAL LOUIS**, Robertson's view of, 469; at Rome Conference, 838; Italian offensive and, 853; influences Cadorna against Italian offensive, 859; at Calais Conference, 892; agrees to compromise on Unity of Command, 893; on Nivelle's tactless treatment of Haig, 897.
- "**LYMAN M. LAW**," sinking of the, 987.
- LYS, BATTLE OF THE**, 1760 *et seq.*; Germans defeated at, 1837.
- McADOO, WILLIAM GIBBS**, Northcliffe and, 1007; influences President Wilson, 1011; American finance under control of, 1016; his political future depends on his handling of British loans, 1018; Northcliffe interviews, 1021.
- McCORMICK, VANCE C.**, 1795; troop-transport and, 1801.
- MacDONALD, J. RAMSAY**, 60; persistently opposes every recruiting effort, 430; opposes conscription, 437, 439; on peace proposals, 533; meets Lloyd George, 625; silent on subject of German peace note, 659; attacks Corn Production Bill, 766; devotes his energies to weakening of the nation's morale, 1118; his presence at Stockholm would have to be balanced by a strong anti-pacifist delegation, 1121; granted passport for Russia, 1123; a possible Kerensky, 1124; not to have a Stockholm passport, 1124-5; sailors refuse to take him to Russia, 1125-6; proposes to go to Paris with Soviet emissaries, 1127; examines arrangements for Stockholm Conference, 1128; hostility to, in House of Commons, 1130; Henderson keeps him in order in Paris, 1130-1; stirs up sedition, 1153; summons the Leeds Convention, 1153; thinks it better to be out of England when the Leeds resolutions are put into practice, but sailors refuse to take him, 1155-6; his peace resolution of 26/7/17, 1212-5, his pacifist influence increases, 1491; raises question of British attitude to Russia, 1552.
- MACDONOGH, GENERAL**, Director of Military Intelligence, 1730; his man-power estimates in *March, 1918*, 1780.
- MACHINE-GUN CORPS**, formation of, 364.
- MACHINE-GUNS**, Ministry of Munitions and, 356-7; Lloyd George's memorandum of 13/11/15 and, 365.
- MACHINES**, importance of in War, 366, 1572-4.
- M'KENNA, REGINALD**, shipbuilding crisis and, 5; 45; naval preparations for War and, 49; 1915 Budget and, 71; criticisms of War Loan of, 73-4; 88; 102; Labour troubles and, 104; general criticism of in 1915, 132; Fisher and, 135; Churchill and, 135; Conservative attitude to, in *May, 1915*, 137-8; asserts that machine-guns cause loss of mobility, 366; his misgivings as to financial position, 408-9; his nerves shaken by gloomy prognostications of J. M. Keynes, 410; puts forward financial objections to conscription, 432; opposes conscription but does not resign, 437; characteristics of, 447; uneasy about Allied prospects, 508; food shortage and, 576; impossibility of including him in Lloyd George's Government, 638-9; Asquith's deputy, 1680; supports Maurice intrigue, 1786.
- M'KENNA DUTIES**, imposed to restrict luxury imports, 745.
- MACKENSEN, GENERAL**, destroys Russian morale, 269; crosses the Danube, 324; his Gorlice attack, 833; his brilliant advance through the Dobrudja, 835.
- MACLAY, SIR J. (later Lord)**, 623; head of Shipping Department, 641; in favour of Convoys, 688; invited by Lloyd George to be Shipping Controller, 726; his energetic handling of shipping, 726 *et seq.*; proposes transfer of Transport Department of Admiralty to Ministry of Shipping, 729-30; opposes nationalisation of shipping, 731-2; his methods contrasted with those of Runciman, 744; on question of feeding Italy and France, 1728; troop transport in *March, 1918*, and, 1728; American troop transport and, 1801.
- MACLELLAN, GENERAL**, 602, 1823.
- MACPHERSON, SIR JAMES IAN**, 1673; Under-Secretary for War, 1690.
- MAHON, GENERAL**, his memorandum of *March, 1918*, on Irish conscription, 1598.
- MAKLAKOFF**, his appeal to Doumergue, 946; 1543.
- MALCOLM, SIR IAN**, his view of Russian situation, 959-60.
- MALLET, SIR LOUIS**, his Report on territorial changes outside Europe, 1060.
- MALVY, M.**, charged with high treason, 1161.
- MANCE, GENERAL**, transport problems and, 473.
- "**MANCHESTER GUARDIAN**," 348; 1691.

ANGIN, GENERAL, a mediocre success, 871; attacks from Villers-Cotterets, 1848.

ANIKOVSKI, nominated chief of Artillery Department, 266.

ANISTY, COMMANDER, made Organising Manager of Convoys, 694.

ANN, SIR JOHN, at Ministry of Munitions, 150.

AN-POWER, problem in *March, 1917*, 1055-6; Passchendaele and, 1368; problem of, 1561-1601; figures showing British, in 1914 and 1918, 1575; Allied and enemy strength, 1577; figures showing British, prove success of Government's recruiting policy, 1591-2; conferences with Labour about, 1593-7; the Bill of *February, 1918*, 1597; alleged shortage of, in *March, 1918*, 1778 *et seq.*; Lloyd George's memorandum of 22/4/18 on, 1782-3; America and 1797; Haig's diaries fail to mention Lloyd George's great part in increasing, 2019-23. [See also under Conscription, Labour and Recruiting.]

AN-POWER COMMITTEE OF THE CABINET, Report of, 1562; setting-up of, 1576; conclusions of, 1579.

AN-POWER DISTRIBUTION BOARD, warning of, 516; industrial compulsion and, 806, 807.

MANSSION HOUSE" SPEECH on Agadir incident, 26.

ARAKEI, contribution to War of, 2005.

ARCH, GENERAL P. C., 1832.

ARCH CONFERENCE (LONDON), 896-8.

ARCH 21, 1918, GERMAN OFFENSIVE OF, preparations for, 1697 *et seq.*; retreat before, 1722 *et seq.*; a brilliant failure, 1753-4; recriminations in England over effects of, 1778 *et seq.*; failure of, 1834-5; Haig's attempt to avoid taking blame for failure, 2026-9.

ARGERIE, DE, at Paris Conference, 536.

ARIE, EMPRESS OF RUSSIA, 1521.

MARINA," sinking of the, 978.

ARKOFF, N. E., 967.

ARLBOROUGH, DUKE OF, 2043.

ARNE, Allied victory on the, 53, 211, 667, 668, 756, 830, 832-3, 871, 1841.

MARSHALL, GENERAL, 1093; almost unopposed in Mesopotamia, 1910; Smuts and, 1922.

MARTIN, WILLIAM, Sixte's letter of 18/4/17 to, 1186-7; interviews Sixte, 1202.

MARY, QUEEN, 42.

MASSEY, W. F., character of, 1034; attends Imperial War Cabinet, 1036; his resolution on Imperial development at Imperial War Cabinet, 1041-2; 2010.

MASTERMAN, CHARLES, hostile to Lloyd George, 640.

MAUDE, GENERAL SIR STANLEY, a sectional general, 468; Mesopotamia campaign and, 912; Palestine campaign and, 913; instructed to act defensively, 1074; asks

permission to advance on Baghdad, 1076-7; captures Baghdad, 1078; capacity, and death of, 1078-9; 1085; his resolution in Mesopotamia, 1922.

MAUD'HUY, GENERAL, morale and, 94.

MAURICE, SIR FREDERICK supports Robertson against War Cabinet, 1671; as comfortably placed as any politician, 1675; subservient and unbalanced 1685; reports appearance of Brandenburg Corps south of Lille, 1725; supplies figures showing comparative strengths of Allies and enemy, 1730; his astonishing arithmetical calculations 1763-4; the instrument by which the Government was to be thrown out, 1778; man-power figures given by on 13/3/18, 1780; his estimates of 10/4/18, 1780-1; his astounding *volte-face* of 22/4/18, 1781; Sir Henry Wilson substitutes General Radcliffe for, 1782; intrigues against the Government, his mind being apparently unhinged, 1784; false allegations against Lloyd George and Bonar Law published by, 1784-6; the tool of astuter men, 1786; Asquith insists on Select Committee inquiry into allegations of, 1787; his double-dealing denounced by Lloyd George, 1787-8; responsible for the statistics he questioned, 1788-9; not present, as he alleged at Versailles discussion, 1790; his grave breach of discipline condoned by Asquith, 1791; dismissed, 1791.

MAXIM GUN, supersession of, 359.

MAX OF BADEN, PRINCE, on "trial of strength between Lloyd George and Lord Grey," 532; peace proposals and, 533; his view of Lloyd George's Caxton Hall speech of 5/1/18, 1493; 1870; his weakness, 1945; becomes Chancellor, 1951-2; opposes appeal for an armistice, 1953; peace terms and, 1957-8; selected by War Council and not by the people, 1959; admits Germany's insincerity, 1960-1; aware that German outlook is hopeless, 1964; on Ludendorff's attitude to Wilson, 1965; too abject in his reply to Wilson, 1966; induces Kaiser to dismiss Ludendorff, 1967; down with influenza at critical juncture, 1980; announces Kaiser's abdication, 1981; 1982.

MAXSE, GENERAL, annoyed that the wounded should tell the truth about Cambrai, 1337; his fatuous attack on fighting troops and wounded at Cambrai inquiry, 1340-1.

MAXSE, LEO, warns Lloyd George against Tory hacks, 623-4.

MAXWELL, GENERAL SIR JOHN, Sinn Fein and, 423; a sectional general, 468.

MAYBURY, SIR HENRY, work of, in connection with French roads, 478.

MECCA, SHERIF OF, British Government and, 1031.

MEDITERRANEAN, necessity for keeping forces in, 672.

MEGIDDO, BATTLE OF, a brilliant operation, 1926.

MEINERTZHAGEN, COLONEL, his brilliant plan for attack on Gaza, 1923.



- MENDSORFF, COUNT**, his visit to Norway, 1177-8; 1186, 1189; discusses peace terms with Smuts, 1478-9; summary of main points emerging from his discussion with Smuts, 1489; 1499, 1504.
- MESOPOTAMIA**, Lloyd George tackles muddle in, 460-1; 480-96; Lloyd George's reasons for describing campaign in 480-1; Lloyd George appoints commission to inquire into questions concerning, 483; requirements of campaign in, 483-4; river transport muddle in 485; shocking revelations concerning medical inefficiency in, 488 *et seq.*; Robertson on position in, 536; Smuts on position in (*April, 1917*), 912; Sir Henry Wilson sees our only hope in (*July, 1918*), 1864; final campaign in, 1922 *et seq.*
- MESSINES RIDGE**, capture of, 1248; Plumer's plan for attack on, 1253; 1267; a clean victory, 1271-2; success partly due to mines, 1301.
- MESTON, SIR JAMES**, Imperial War Cabinet and, 1028-9.
- METHUEN, LORD, 75.**
- METTERNICH, COUNT**, Lloyd George's naval discussions with, 7; his opinion of Lloyd George, 8-9, 17; Lloyd George's Mansion House Speech and, 27.
- MEXICO**, Zimmermann proposes German alliance with, 988.
- MICHAEL, GRAND DUKE**, 950-1.
- MICHAELIS, DR.**, becomes German Chancellor, 1209; his speech on peace terms (*19/7/17*), 1210; Lloyd George's reply to his speech, 1211-2; Vatican peace note and, 1223; endorses Ludendorff's views on annexations, 1228; his letter of *12/9/17* to Army Chiefs, 1229-30; 1231.
- MICHAILOVITCH, GRAND DUKE NICOLAS**, 1521.
- MICHELER, GENERAL**, suggests Italian offensive, 836; in favour of abandonment of Nivelle offensive, 900; urges Italian Front attack, 1304, 1375; his memorandum on Italian Front, 1618; 1619.
- MIDDLETON, SIR T. H.**, expansion of tillage and, 762.
- MIDLETON, LORD**, denounces Irish settlement, 423.
- MILITARISM, GERMAN**, Lloyd George's replies to Labour questions on, 631; supreme, even towards end of war, 1931.
- MILITARY CAREER**, importance of seniority and society in, 2041.
- MILITARY CLIQUE, BRITISH**, anti-Government intrigues of, 1668.
- MILITARY CLIQUE, GERMAN**, leads to nation's downfall, 1669.
- MILITARY INFORMATION**, extraordinary quality of (*July, 1918*), 1866.
- MILITARY MIND**, narrowness of, 1823; stubbornness of, not peculiar to America, 1826; does not seem to understand arithmetic, 1839; its attitude in *July, 1918*, represented by Sir Henry Wilson's fantastic memorandum of *25/7/18*, 1858; obsessed with North West Frontier of India, 1864; impossibility of trusting, 1867; regards thinking as a form of mutiny, 2041.
- MILITARY SERVICE BILL**, of *April, 1918*, 1600.
- MILITARY TRAINING**, flair in a General is more valuable than, 1247.
- MILIUKOFF, P. N.**, his appeal to Doumergue, 946; a constitutional monarchist, 955; safety of the Czar and, 972; asks permission of British Government for British Socialists to visit Russia, 1119-20; Constantinople and, 1506; incapable of directing the Revolution, 1519; fighting with Kerensky, 1519-20; 1520; instigates desertion of cadets, 1532; 1550.
- MILLERAND, ALEXANDRE**, visits London to discuss strategy, 240; Balkans and, 242-3; discusses position about Salonika, 306; 1603.
- MILNE, GENERAL SIR GEORGE** (later Lord), a sectional general, 468; Macedonian Front and, 537; Salonika and, 549, 569, 570; on Balkan position, 574; on Salonika strategy, 818; Rome Conference and, 838; not consulted about Bulgarian armistice, 1946; cavalierly treated by d'Esperely, 1950; in command of Balkan operations, 1975, 1977.
- MILNER, LORD**, Lloyd George never conscious of Party associations of, 449; supports Lloyd George, 596; a member of the ruling class, 610; 621; makes special appeal to intelligentsia of Tory Party, 622; member of the first War Cabinet, 634; joins Lloyd George's Government, 641; Lloyd George wishes to have him at the Admiralty, 699; recommendations of his Committee on increased food production, 756-7; food supply co-ordination and, 796; French demands for corn and, 797; industrial compulsion and, 807; at Rome Conference, 838; on Germany's success in surprising the Allies, 855; nominated by Lloyd George to represent Britain in Russia, 928; his note on Petrograd Conference, 932-5; his note to Russian Government, 933-4; on results of Petrograd Conference, 937; on the inadequacy of the help that was offered to Russia, 939-40; utterly dejected over position in Russia, 940; his mentality, 942; on the unlikelihood of Revolution in Russia, 942; his interview with Chelnokoff and Lvoff, 944-6; Czar and, 949; Imperial War Cabinet and, 1032; 1036; peace terms and, 1036; on League of Nations, 1039; Russian hopes of Britain and, 1054; 1059, 1133; Rome Conference and, 1259; Haig's Flanders project and, 1272; sceptical about Passchendaele plan, 1277; opposes Haig's Passchendaele plans, 1292; Bolshevik peace overtures and, 1549-50; 1617; General Reserve question and, 1635, 1670; his letter of *8/2/18* on question of deposing Haig and Robertson, 1671-2; Lloyd George's letter of *9/2/18* to, 1673; denounced by Colonel Repington, 1675; 1685; likes Sir H. Wilson, 1688; General Reserve and, 1714; 1729; sent to France with instructions to get Foch appointed to command Allied Armies, 1730-1; learns facts about Fifth Army, 1737; attends conference of *25/3/18* at

Pétain's headquarters, 1737; expresses misgivings about Pétain, 1738; 1739; gets Haig to agree to Foch's co-ordinating appointment, 1740; exonerates Gough, 1742; American troop-transport and, 1801; at Versailles Conference of 29/1/18 on American troops, 1809; has interviews with Pershing, 1823, 1824; suggests Rhineland occupation, 1970; agrees to Passchendaele plans though very dubious, 2023-4; a claimant for honour of introducing Unity of Command, 2024-5, 2026.

ILNER'S COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DE-  
SIDERATA IN TERMS OF PEACE, summary  
of Report of, 1060.

INERS' FEDERATION, recruiting and,  
1773-4.

INES, Lloyd George proposes state control  
of, 628.

IRABELLO, ITALIAN MINISTER, naval  
limitation and, 11.

ISITCH, GENERAL, breaks through to  
Monastir, 318.

ITCHELL, I. H., his views on Labour ques-  
tion, 180.

DIR, SIR ERNEST, at Ministry of Munitions,  
150, 163; appointed to Inventions Depart-  
ment of Ministry of Munitions, 371; to  
keep in touch with Hickman about inven-  
tions, 372; letter from, complaining of  
War Offices' obstructionist policy, 372-4;  
transport and, 476-7.

DLTKE, H. J. L. VON, unprepared for out-  
break of War, 32; refuses to march on  
Russia instead of on Belgium, 38; refuses  
to give up attack on Belgium, 58; not  
expecting War, 1996.

DNASH, GENERAL SIR JOHN, commands  
Anzac's, 2008; his qualities not advertised,  
2016; a civilian but a brilliant leader, 2041-2.

DNEY, SIR LEO C., concentration of ship-  
ping in Atlantic and, 735-6.

DNRO, GENERAL, sent to Mediterranean,  
298-9; Dardanelles and, 311; results of his  
visit to Mediterranean, 311-2; urges  
Robertson to permit Maude to maintain an  
aggressive front, 1075.

DNS, retreat from, 24, 52.

ONTAGU, E. S., financial crisis (1914) and,  
52; munitions and, 108-11; his memoran-  
dum on drink trade, 198 *et seq.*; Balkans  
and, 243; tanks and, 385; raises question  
of responsibility for manufacture of aero-  
planes, 582-3; Asquith and, 599; his  
friendship for Asquith prevents him from  
joining Lloyd George at once, 635;  
National Service and, 804-5; Air Force  
control and, 1098; in favour of Whitley  
Councils, 1162.

ONTAGU OF BEAULIEU, LORD, resigns  
from Joint War Air Committee, 1098.

ONTDIDER-NOYON sector, German attack  
on, 1845.

ONTE CRISTALLO, storming, of 1393.

ORGAN (J. P.) AND CO., Anglo-American  
finances and, 1020.

MORLEY, LORD, 28; his attitude to Belgian  
neutrality, 43; opposed to War, 444; on  
Asquith, 601; 611.

"MORNING POST," attacks Government on  
General Reserve question, 1670; publishes  
the war plans of the Allies on 11/2/18,  
thereby betraying Allies to Germany, 1674  
*et seq.*; Germans grateful for "treason" of,  
1676-7; Cabinet discusses treachery of,  
1678.

MOROCCO, Germany and, 9, 14; Anglo-  
French relations and, 25 *et seq.*

MORRIS, SIR E. P., attends Imperial War  
Cabinet, 1036.

MOSLEMS, Turkey and, 1068-9.

MOSSES, MR., Treasury Agreement and, 179.

MOUKTAR BEY, question of peace with  
Turkey and, 1504; 1507.

MOULTON, LORD, F., at Ministry of Munitions,  
151; munitions and, 161; Chairman of  
Committee of High Explosives Supply, 163;  
chances of success through attrition and,  
258; High Explosives Committee establishes  
factories, 339; his work in production of  
high explosives, 342 *et seq.*; letter from, on  
War Office's obstructionist tactics, 344-5;  
the rejection of his explosives recommenda-  
tions, 370.

MUNITIONS, War-time expenditure of, un-  
dreamt of before 1914, 49; steps taken to  
obtain adequate supplies of, 75 *et seq.*;  
Cabinet Committee on, set up, 87-8; death  
of Cabinet Committee, 102; conference of  
5/3/15 on, 102; growing uneasiness over  
shortage of, in 1915, 132; shortage of, con-  
tributes to fall of Liberals, 133; Asquith  
refuses debate on (May, 1915), 138; Lloyd  
George's analysis of position regarding, in  
July, 1915, 153-4; setting up of Central  
Labour Supply Committee, 187; the  
Russian collapse caused by failure to pro-  
duce sufficient quantities of, 274 *et seq.*;  
foolish attitude of Allied generals to supply  
of, 280 *et seq.*; the crucial issue in *Septem-  
ber, 1915*, 287-8; War Office neglect of,  
308; position improved after Somme offen-  
sive, 321; Boulogne Conference and, 328  
*et seq.*; Lloyd George's "Big Gun Pro-  
gramme," 332 *et seq.*; filling the shells, 341  
*et seq.*; difficulties with T.N.T., 342; prob-  
lems of shell filling, 354 *et seq.*; Lord  
Chetwynd's work in production of,  
355-6; work done at Chilwell factory,  
355-6; America as a source of, 393; ship-  
ping and, 720; man-power needed for,  
1565; Canada produces, 2009-10; Haig's  
diaries fail to mention Lloyd George's work  
in production of, 2019-23; way the generals  
muddled problem of, 2039.

MUNITIONS, MINISTRY OF, formation of,  
142; work of, 143 *et seq.*; War Office  
jealousy of, 143-4; passing of Ministry of  
Munitions Act, 158; definition of powers  
of 158-9; Labour position on formation of,  
180-1; natural growth of the Welfare move-  
ment and, 205; women workers and, 205-6;  
Welfare section of 206; practical achieve-  
ments of, 327 *et seq.*; controls practically  
the whole of the industrial life of the

- nation, 337; its relations with trade organisations, 338; establishment of national factories, 338 *et seq.*; production of machine-guns under, 356 *et seq.*; Inventions and Research Department set up, 368, 371 *et seq.*; undertakes manufacture of tanks, 383; summary of achievements of, 386-92; principles on which it was organised, 392; success of, 458-9.
- MUNITIONS OF WAR ACTS**, passing of first, 181 *et seq.*; liquor trade and, 204; strikes prohibited under, 1148; operations of, give rise to discontent, 1157; good effect of 1917 Act, 1159-60.
- MUNITIONS OF WAR COMMITTEE**, appointment of, 107-8; work and troubles of, 111-2; kept in ignorance, 122; end of, 163.
- MUNITIONS SUPPLY ORGANISATION**, Ministry of Munitions and, 163.
- MUNITION WORKERS**, housing of, 208.
- MUNITION WORKERS COMMITTEE**, HEALTH OF, setting up of, 206.
- MURMANSK EXPEDITION**, undertaken at invitation of local Soviet, 1892-3.
- MURRAY, GENERAL SIR A. J.**, 50; Grey and 305; supports Lloyd George's views on machine-guns, 365; a sectional general, 468; on position in Turkey (1916), 1074; instructed to act defensively, 1075; proposes to take El Arish and advance to Rafah, but Robertson refuses reinforcements, 1081-2; clears the Sinai Peninsula, 1083; Robertson does not desire that he should continue offensive, 1083-4; fumbles at first Battle of Gaza, 1085; invited to capture Jerusalem, but is refused reinforcements, 1086; dissatisfaction with, 1087; replaced by Allenby, 1089; 1090.
- MUSSOLINI, BENITO**, 56; the origin of his attitude to France, 865.
- MUTINY**, in French Army, 558, 829, 907; 1260; in German Navy, 1884; 1945; in Russian Army, 1260.
- "MY NORTHCLIFFE DIARY" (CLARKE)**, 126.
- NABOKOFF, C.**, Russia's attitude to Stockholm Conference explained by, 1133-4; Henderson refrains from reading his letter to Labour Conference, 1135; grants permission for publication of his letter, 1136; to remain as Russian Chargé d'Affaires until superseded, 1552.
- NANCY**, French repel attack at, 53.
- NAPOLEON**, 6, 56, 272; his failure to crush Prussia, 526; 668, 910, 1015; in attempting to limit Prussian Army creates Prussian military system, 1038; 1201, 1223-4; 1322, 1392, 1399, 1428, 1458, 1486, 1564, 1691, 1879, 1897, 2043.
- NAPOLEONIC WARS**, 2.
- NASH, SIR PHILIP**, transport problems and, 473; deputy to Geddes in France, 474.
- NATHAN, SIR MATTHEW**, resigns his post in Ireland, 418.
- NATIONAL FACTORIES**, establishment of, 338 *et seq.*
- NATIONALISATION OF SHIPPING**, proposals for, 731-3.
- NATIONALITY, PRINCIPLE OF**, Balfour's peace memorandum and, 524.
- NATIONAL REGISTRATION**, Long introduces Bill for, 430.
- "NATIONAL REVIEW,"** 623.
- NATIONAL SECURITY LEAGUE**, President Wilson and, 981.
- NATIONAL SERVICE**, formation of Directorate of, 642; system of, 801-16; initial proposals for, 804-5; never completely enforced, 1566.
- NATIONAL SERVICE, MINISTRY OF**, meagre results of, 808 *et seq.*; cost of, 812; reconstruction of, under Sir Auckland Geddes, 812-3; invaluable services rendered by, when reconstructed, 815-6.
- NAVAL AIR SERVICE**, undertakes Home Defence, 1096.
- NAVAL AND SHIPPING CONFERENCE, INTER-ALLIED**, Rome Conference gives birth to, 858; success of, 996.
- NAVAL AUTHORITIES**, not consulted by generals, 1411-2.
- NAVAL COUNCIL, INTER-ALLIED**, 1440; Asquith raises question of, 1446.
- NAVAL SHIPBUILDING PROGRAMMES OF GERMANY AND ENGLAND**, pernicious influence of, 4 *et seq.*; Lloyd George's attitude to, 5.
- NAVY, BRITISH**, England's exclusive reliance on, 75; crucial part played by, 1457; its man-power demands put first, 1588. [*See also under* Admiralty, Convoy System, and Submarine Warfare.]
- NEKRASSOFF**, 1534, 1535.
- NELSON, LORD**, 1201, 1564.
- NEUTRAL COUNTRIES**, War-time problems of, 393-4; Britain's difficulties with, 519.
- NEUVE-CHAPELLE**, shell shortage at, 113-4.
- NEWBOLT, SIR HENRY**, 678.
- NEWFOUNDLAND**, War record of, 2009.
- NEWMAN, SIR GEORGE**, health of munition workers and, 206; educational reform and, 1994.
- NEW ZEALAND**, her War record, 2008-9.
- NICHOLAS II, CZAR OF RUSSIA**, his aversion to War, 34; suggests reference to Hague Court in July, 1914, 36; finds it impossible to cancel mobilisation decree, 38; preparation for War and, 263; blamed for Army's inefficiency, 273; Kaiser and, 407; 555; Petrograd Conference and, 928; abdication of, 931; Sir J. Hanbury-Williams and, 937-8; Russians desire his removal, 941; hatred of, 943; 945; his arrogant reply to Buchanan's suggestion that he should attempt to regain his people's confidence, 947; agrees to French proposals about the Rhine, 947-8; incompetence and cruelty of, 953-4; the narrowness of his "virtue," 954-5; insane with anger at the Duma's rejoicings over Rasputin's death, 957; blunders fatally in taking command of the Army, 905; Bonar Law and, 969; attempts made to save him from execution and to



bring him to England, 971-6; on intimate terms with George V, 972; alleged to be doped to insensibility, 1521.

ICHOLAS, GRAND DUKE, state of his Armies, 262 *et seq.*; preparations for War and, 263; military competence of, 282; 956.

ICOLL, SIR W. R., Palestine campaign and, 1090.

ICOLSON, SIR ARTHUR (later Lord Carnock), 33.

ICOLSON, HAROLD, 33.

IEMANN, ALFRED, quoted, 1871.

IVELLE, GENERAL, Robertson disapproves of, 469; holds false views of German weakness, 825; his refusal to face unpalatable facts, 831; Briand prefers his Chantilly plan to Italian offensive, 851; unable to spare guns for Italian offensive, 851; Briand's high opinion of, 852; whole responsibility for his offensive fastened on to Lloyd George, 858; analogy between the case of Cadorna and Nivelle, and Falkenhayn and Hoetzendorff, 864; Robertson's dislike of, 865; his strategical principle, 865; chosen by Joffre to succeed him, 871-2; his war record, 873; concerned only with French Front, 873-4; his new ideas not carried out, 874; his achievements at Verdun endear him to French hearts, 875; his brilliant capture of Douaumont, 875-6; Robertson on his tactics, 876; French enthusiasm for, 877; his letter to Haig outlining his plan, 881-3; Haig's reply to, on subject of 1917 offensive, 884; appeals to French War Minister about his disagreement with Haig, 885-6; Lloyd George refuses to discuss 1917 offensive with in absence of Haig, 886-7; Ludendorff on his choice of Front, 889-90; at Calais Conference, 891-2; protests against British demand for trains, 892; disliked by Haig and Robertson, 894; tactless in handling of Haig, 895; Lloyd George protests against his peremptory manner to Haig, 896-7; his distrust of Haig, 898; arrangements for carrying out of his offensives known to Germans, 898; jealousy aroused by promotion of, 899; why he persisted with his plan, 901-2; facts ignored by, 902; dispute between Pétain and, 905; attacked by politicians, 906-7; forced to resign, 907-8; his offensive policy considered dangerous, 915; Robertson's attitude to his offensive plans, 917; Robertson's changing views of his offensive, 919-20; Lloyd George's attitude to his offensive, 920; at Paris Conference of 4/5/17, 925 *et seq.*; 1258; holds over-sanguine views on strength of German troops, 1259; dismissal of, 1260; 1374; opposed to Italian offensive, 1375; captivates Briand, 1406; not anxious for success on Italian Front, 1406-7; only another Joffre, 1411; controls combined British and French attacks in spring, 1917, 1449; Haig's contempt for, 1452; 1453; delayed by Haig's reluctance to take over more line, 1653; personal rivalry between Haig and, 1657; British Army's success under, 1747; unfortunate as Generalissimo, 1750.

NIVELLE OFFENSIVE, Germans upset strategy of 325; 873 *et seq.*; character of, 888; plans for, discovered by Germans, 898-900; French Army chagrined at failure of, 1259; impossible to stop, 1375; Lord French on, 1428-9.

NIXON, GENERAL, appointed to command Indian Expeditionary Service, 481; reinforcements refused to, 481; orders advance on Baghdad, 482; river transport shortage and, 485; fresh boats refused to, 486; takes a chance, 487; obstructs Buchanan, 488; refuses offers of help from Red Cross, 491; severely censured, 492.

NOEL-BUXTON, LORD, replies to Asquith on Serbia, 1446.

NONCONFORMISTS, recruiting among, 215; Kitchener opposes use of their chaplains, 451.

NORTH, LORD, 1796.

NORTHCLIFFE, LORD, on ministerial ignorance of Foreign affairs, 28-9; attacks Kitchener on shell shortage, 123; never brought into consultation with Lloyd George, Carson and Law, 586-7; "wants a smash," 590-1; 631; Cabinet decides to appoint him head of American Mission, 1000; instructions given to, on work in America, 1001-2; horror at his appointment, 1002-3; British Embassy's chilly reception of, 1002-3; his quarrel with Spring-Rice, 1003-5; House's tribute to his success in America, 1005-6; British-American financial arrangements and, 1006-8; handicaps of his temperament, 1008; American confiscation of ships built to British order and, 1009 *et seq.*; American loans and, 1015-6; asks that Reading or Bonar Law be sent to America, 1018; his cable of 7/9/17 on financial situation in America, 1018-9; on arrival of Reading in America, 1020; returns to England, 1021; refuses to take on Air Ministry (in *The Times*), though it had not been offered him, 1110-2; his lack of discretion, 1112; worships at the Haig shrine, 1318; the mouth-organ of Sir W. Robertson, 1318; seemingly ignorant of attempts of staff officers to advise Haig, 1339; supports Haig and Robertson, 1370-1; deserving of credit for his war-time propaganda, 1873.

NORTHCLIFFE PRESS, inefficiency of War Office and, 309.

"NORTHWICH CHRONICLE," 124.

NORWAY, likely to yield under pressure of German submarine warfare, 679-80.

"NOVAIA ZHIZM," 1525.

O'CONNOR, T. P., tolerant attitude of, 421; 1605.

OFFICERS' TRAINING CORPS, Haldane and, 49.

"OFFICIAL HISTORY," says Smuts was no soldier, 1576-7; on reduction in size of divisions, 1582; accuses Government of withholding men, 1590; its misleading account of controversy over extension of Front, 1665-6; thinks that Haig was right to keep his reserves far from the battle, 1755; on *March*, 1918, offensive, 2028.

- O'GRADY, JAMES**, joins Labour deputation to Russia, 1118.
- OIL**, Germans within twenty miles of Roumanian wells, 545; effects of loss of Roumanian oil-fields on Germany, 1920-1; Germany beaten partly through lack of, 2000.
- OLD AGE PENSIONS**, 70, 622.
- OLDENBURG, S. F.**, food shortage in Petrograd and, 967.
- OLIVER, VICE-ADMIRAL SIR H. F.**, Convoy system and, 678; slowness of, 684-5.
- "OLYMPIA,"** dispatched to Murmansk, 1893; 1894.
- ORDNANCE BOARD**, dissolution of, 378.
- ORLANDO, V. E.**, Lloyd George meets, 1394-5; at Rapallo Conference, 1396 *et seq.*; his Rapallo Conference report on Italian Armies, 1397-8; his passionate determination to defeat Austria, 1398; at Paris Conference of 29/11/17, 1617; his reception of Clemenceau's Italian Front proposals, 1619; 1630; General Reserve and, 1640; approves of appointment of Foch as President of General Reserve, 1642; agrees to transfer of Italian troops to Western Front, 1661, 1664; 1665; General Reserve idea favoured by, 1720; Foch's relation to Italian Army and, 1749; question of Unity of Command and, 1775-7; 1828, 1946; situation after Bulgarian collapse and, 1947; Austrian armistice and, 1978.
- OSBORNE, SAMUEL**, munition workers and, 206.
- OTTLEY, ADMIRAL SIR CHARLES**, Committee of Imperial Defence and, 49.
- PACIFIST MOVEMENT**, progress of, 1773.
- PACIFIST PROPAGANDA**, 1281; in Italy, 1401; having powerful effect, 1491.
- PACIFISTS**, British, encourage Ludendorff, 1476; German, 1499.
- PAGE, T. N.**, his letter from Rome to Bryan, 405-6.
- PAGE, W. H.**, Wilson's peace note and, 661; approves of British Mission to America, 994; in favour of Northcliffe as head of American Mission, 1000; 1815.
- PAGET, GENERAL**, questions of equipment and, 252; Balkan situation and, 256.
- PAINLEVÉ, PAUL**, Sarraïl and, 846; on proposal for Italian offensive, 900; on Nivelle plan, 901; strongly supports Pétain, 922; expresses French Government's determination to continue the offensive, 926-7; Anglo-French Conference (28/5/17) and, 1199; Karl's peace moves and, 1240; Kuhlmann peace move and, 1241; discusses Kuhlmann peace move with Lloyd George, 1241-2; his evidence concerning French change of plans, 1262-3; 1264; Italian Front and, 1374; 1375; visits Italy with Lloyd George, 1394; supports Lloyd George's criticisms of Italian G.H.Q., 1399-1400; Lloyd George's letter of 30/10/17 to, on united war direction, 1435-7; accepts Lloyd George's ideas on Unity of Command, 1437; his letter of 4/11/17 to Lloyd George on Inter-Allied Council, 1438-9; 1440; announces setting-up of Inter-Allied Council, 1442; character of, 1602-3; fall of, 1602-3; question of extension of British Front and, 1656; 1790; attached to Sarraïl, 1914.
- PAISH, SIR GEORGE**, financial crisis (1914) and, 63; moratorium and, 67.
- PALEOLOGUE, MAURICE G.**, 33; his account of meeting between Maklakkoff and Doumergue, 946; Doumergue's preoccupation with French annexations and, 947-8.
- PALESTINE**, Smuts on campaign in, April, 1917, 912-3; outline of campaign in, 1080 *et seq.*; Robertson's memorandum on, 1083; Robertson opposed to offensive in, 1424; Wilson sees no hope in (July, 1918), 1864.
- PALITZINE, GENERAL**, 554; at Chantilly Conference, 568.
- PALMERSTON, LORD**, 3, 29, 35, 47, 60.
- PAPEN, FRANZ VON**, attempts to cripple American munitions plants, 403.
- PARES, SIR BERNARD**, his report on conditions in Russia, 960-3; Homyakov's letter to, 962-3.
- PARIS CONFERENCE**, decision to hold, 542-3; Lloyd George's memorandum on situation before, 544 *et seq.*; first session of, 556; a complete farce, 572; that of 4/5/17, 925-7.
- PARKER, SIR GILBERT**, sounds American attitude to Allies, 394-5; his letter to Lloyd George on America and the War, 977-9.
- PARKER, JAMES**, Junior Lord of the Treasury, 642.
- PARLIAMENT ACT (1911)**, its effect on Electoral reform, 1164.
- PARLIAMENT AND LOCAL ELECTIONS BILL**, 1165.
- PARMA, DUCHESS OF**, Austrian peace overtures and, 1178.
- PARODI, DR.**, Kerr interviews, 1490; de Skrzynski interviews, 1498; summary of his views, 1504-9.
- PARTY POLITICS**, Lloyd George's proposals for Party truce (1910), 21-4; limitations of the system of, 24; War and, 128 *et seq.*; control Lloyd George's choice of personnel in December, 1916, 620.
- PASSCHENDAELE CAMPAIGN**, means of avoiding, 829; Haig over-estimates effect of 831; transport problem and, 892; Haig obsessed with, 1242; how the plans were made, 1247-57; bloody futility of, 1247; plans for had been cherished since 1916 by Haig, 1247-8; objectives of, 1248; transport preparations for, 1248; blame for inception of ascribed to Admiralty and politicians, 1249; Lloyd George's consistent disapproval of, 1250; first document issued by G.H.Q. on idea of, 1253-4; conditions laid down by G.H.Q. as essential to success, 1255; Russia's impending collapse affects plans for, 1256-7; condition of French Army and consequent changes in French strategy, 1258-70; plans for, in hands of the enemy, 1260; plans for, discussed between Government and G.H.Q., 1271 *et seq.*; the scheme summarised, 1276-7; Lloyd George's arguments against, 1279 *et*

*seq.*; Lloyd George's alternative plans, 1283 *et seq.*; Cabinet misled about plans for, 1294 *et seq.*; French attitude towards, 1294; unsuitable character of the ground, 1295-6; generals doubt wisdom of the project, 1297; strategical alternatives to, 1301; the first objective, 1305; G.H.Q. have no conception of state of ground, 1307; all generals save Haig opposed to continuance of the offensive, 1311; initial effect upon Germany, 1312; how the public were doped, 1313-4; ends in fiasco, 1320-1; consequences of, 1325-33; G.H.Q. virtually admits futility of, 1327-8; Robertson admits failure of, 1370; Haig's morbid exaltation about, 1421; Nivelle offensive more successful than, 1428-9; Robertson's defence of plans for (*June, 1917*), 1461-3; Haig's memorandum in defence of 1464-6; stupid and squalid strategy of, 1467-8; cost of, 1468-9; manpower necessary for, 1568; War Office finds more men for, than it had promised, 1569-70; Haig's passion for, 1610; abandonment of the dearly-won salient, 1768; extra 200,000 men could not have procured victory in, 2034; dilemma Lloyd George was in about, 2036-7; appendix of correspondence on, 1342-64.

**PATRIOTISM**, the limits of, among the land-owning class, 785; English and French contrasted, 1201.

**PAYER, VON** (German Vice-Chancellor), his speech on peace terms, 1939-40; divergence between his views and those of Lloyd George, expressed the same day, 1940-1.

**PEACE**, proposals formulated by Robertson, 497-503; Labour Party and, 630-1; 632; notes on, issued by Germany and by President Wilson, 652-6; text of German note of 12/12/16, 653-4; Imperial War Cabinet and terms of, 1036-7; Lloyd George on conditions of, at Imperial War Cabinet, 1049-50; Austrian proposals for, 1175-1204; German desire for, 1207 *et seq.*; aims of German note of *December, 1916*, 1208; the Reichstag resolution of 19/7/17, 1209; text of Vatican note, 1216-7; Allied attitude towards Vatican peace note, 1217-8; danger of inconclusive, 1218-9; German reply to Vatican note, 1222 *et seq.*; Ludendorff's ideas on, 1223-8; attempts made by Kuhlmann to secure, 1231 *et seq.*; Balfour's memorandum on Kuhlmann move, 1237-40; Kuhlmann's supposed terms, 1241; Kuhlmann move approved by German High Command as good War manoeuvre, 1246; belligerents state their terms, 1477 *et seq.*; Smuts-Mensdorff discussion on, 1478-89; the necessity of stating Allied aims, 1490; first Austrian note, 1879; how it came, 1930 *et seq.*; terms Britain insisted on, 1930-1; objects of German "peace offensive," 1931-2; satisfactory terms not obtainable before autumn of 1918, 1933; Germans discuss terms at Spa on 14/8/18, 1933-4; Austrian note of 14/9/18, 1937-9; von Payer's statement of terms, 1939-40; von Payer's terms not acceptable to Allies, 1940; Wilson enunciates five essentials of, 1942-3; Central Powers insincere in their alleged desire for, 1943; Bulgarian

armistice, 1946-7; suggested terms for Turkish armistice, 1948-9; text of first German note to Wilson, 1953; text of second Austrian note, 1954; terms of an armistice with Germany, as indicated by Allied Military representatives, 1954-5; Foch's armistice terms, 1955-6; Lloyd George and Baron Sonnino think the military armistice terms too severe, 1956; Wilson's first reply to German note, 1956-7; German insincerity in asking for an armistice, 1960-1; Germany's second note, 1961; Haig's armistice terms, 1970; moderate terms not possible, 1973-4; Turkey sues for an armistice, 1974; Austrian armistice, 1978; German terms agreed upon by Supreme War Council, 1978; problems after the armistice, 1986-7. [*See also under Armistice.*]

**PEASE, ARTHUR**, munitions and, 108.

**PEEL, SIR ROBERT**, 47.

**PENSIONS DEPARTMENT**, Lloyd George proposes formation of, 628.

**PERCY, LORD EUSTACE**, peace moves and, 519-20.

**PERKINS, T. N.**, 1796; troop-transport and, 1801.

**PERLEY, SIR G. H.**, attends Imperial War Cabinet, 1036.

**PERSHING, GENERAL JOHN**, lack of American munitions and, 1022; Russian situation and, 1531; at Paris Conference of 29/11/17, 1617; at Compiègne Conference, 1627-29; insists on autonomy of American Army, 1628; in command of all American troops in France, 1638; 1745; supports idea of Unity of Command, 1748; troop-transport and, 1801-2; insists on being in absolute command of American troops, 1803, 1804; interviews Haig, 1804; interviews Robertson, 1805; obstinate about transport problems, 1806; suspicious of his Allied colleagues, 1807; objects to Robertson's proposals regarding American troops, 1808-10; carries his point against Robertson, 1810; admits unnecessary delay in bringing Americans into action, 1810; 1812; alarmed at prospect of British policy with regard to Americans coming into force, 1813; offers troops to Pétain, 1815, 1817, 1818; wrecks arrangements made by Lloyd George and President Wilson for transport of American troops, 1819; differs from Wilson on transport question, 1820; cares less for the fate of the Allies than for creating an American Army, 1821, 1822; refuses to accept Wilson's ruling on American troop question, 1823-4; refuses to be influenced by Foch, 1824; Lloyd George coaxes him to compromise, 1824-5; had no definite instructions from Government, 1825; no worse than other generals, 1826; receives little sympathy in America, 1826; shortage of trained American soldiers and, 1826-7; accepts compromise, 1827-8; on numbers of American troops, 1829; his futile recommendations on aeroplane construction, 1832-3; Hamel attack and, 1845-6; objects to Foch's plans of 24/7/18, 1856; 1876.



PERSONAL FACTOR, its influence on historical events, 55.

PESCHIERA CONFERENCE OF 8/11/17 at, 1400-3; Lloyd George's criticism of Italian High Command at, 1402.

PÉTAIN, MARSHAL, Amiens offensive (1918) and, 831; suggests Italian offensive, 836, 837; a mediocre success, 871; Unity of Command and, 895; 900; dispute between Nivelle and, 905; appointed to succeed Nivelle, 907; in favour of abandoning offensive, 920; Lloyd George summarises his arguments in favour of defensive tactics, 921-3; at Paris Conference of 4/5/17, 925 *et seq.*; adheres to his "limited offensive" policy, 927; objects to Stockholm Conference, 1123; 1206; his silence about abatement of French attack, 1258; 1260; restores order in mutinous Army, 1260-1; reticent about mutiny, 1261; a man of integrity, 1262; denounces "folly of a great general offensive," 1264; orders tanks, 1264; Italian Front and, 1265; disapproves of Haig's Flanders campaign, 1266; offends Haig by expressing disapproval, 1266; his limited offensives are successful, 1266; Haig misrepresents ideas of, 1277-8; opposed to Passchendaele, 1299; his tactics an alternative to Passchendaele, 1301; 1304, 1332; anxious that Haig should take over more line, 1333; Italian Front and, 1374-5; sends six batteries to Italy, 1378; convinced of primary importance of Italian Front, 1379-80; nursing French Army, 1389; accepts Lloyd George's ideas on Unity of Command, 1437; scoffs at Haig, 1452; grasps change in situation due to Russian collapse, 1453; in favour of defensive policy in 1918, 1467; thinks Americans will not count until 1919, 1475; Russian situation and, 1531; his man-power estimates, 1571; 1612; discusses strategy with Haig, 1613-16; Italian Front and, 1618-9; continues to disagree with Haig, 1622; his comments on Foch's plans for 1918, 1625-6; his disagreement with Foch, 1626-7; at Compiègne Conference, 1627-9; dislikes idea of Inter-Allied Reserve, 1629; Clemenceau thinks Foch a better soldier than, 1630; Versailles staff accept his view of 1918 position, 1632; angrily opposed to idea of General Reserve, 1635; agrees with Haig as to prospects for 1918, 1637; discussions about General Reserve and, 1637 *et seq.*; cognisant of nature of General Reserve, 1639; question of extension of British Front and, 1657; reaches agreement with Haig on Front extension, 1659-60; 1661; urges further extension of British Front, 1662; agrees to let Front extension question drop, 1664; 1665, 1665-6; jealous of Foch, 1669; had not dissented from War Council's decision, 1674; departs from decisions taken at Versailles, 1696; holds false views of German Spring offensive, 1918, 1698; convinced Germans would make their biggest effort on his Front, 1710; said he had made complete arrangements for assisting Haig if necessary, 1710-1; had assented to idea of General Reserve, 1711; 1713; reserves for March, 1918, and, 1715, 1716; his attitude ambiguous, 1716-7; Clemenceau

favours, 1719; refuses to supply divisions for General Reserve, 1719; Clemenceau reassures him about General Reserve, 1719; his reinforcements plan fails, 1727; his arrangements for assisting Haig, 1729; Haig and, 1731; his attitude during early days of March, 1918, offensive, 1733-4; sends help to Haig, 1734; sees Haig, 1735; arranging to relieve Fifth Army, 1737; in command of Fifth Army, 1737; Milner's doubts of 1738; gives orders for retreat, 1739-40; no ready to share his authority with Foch, 1743; 1745; his aims differ from those of Haig, 1747; his limitations, 1751; favours a British retreat southwards to join French Army, 1770; Haig and, 1790; 1793; is offered troops by Pershing, 1815; his stubbornness, 1826; desires to cover Paris, 1836; his orders disobeyed in Aisne battle, 1841; does not understand Foch's strategy, 1847; his "elastic front" tactics, 1848; objects to Foch's plans of 24/7/18, 1856; 1857; Wilson aware of his pessimistic views in July, 1918, 1858; in agreement with Wilson, 1865; invariably timid, 1867; Haig a convert to his strategy, 1868; 1876; pessimistic forebodings of, 1877; foresees a campaign in 1919, 1910-1; Italian Front and, 2001-2; conspires with Haig to destroy General Reserve, 2019; 2024-5, 2028, 2029-30.

PETROFF, his release demanded by Trotsky, 1540, 1546; set free by British, 1548-9.

PETROGRAD CONFERENCE, decision to hold, 928; personnel of delegations, 928-30, 931; lack of co-operation exposed at, 931; Milner's comments on, 932-5.

PETTITI, GENERAL, on transport in Salonika, 570.

PHILIPPS, SIR IVOR, at Ministry of Munitions, 151; his letter on Lloyd George's "Big Gun Programme," 335-6; Stokes gun and, 369; relinquishes secretaryship in Ministry of Munitions, 375; announces the end of Greek threat to Allies, 857.

PHILLIPS, MR., Anglo-American co-operation and, 1007.

PICHON, S. J. M., makes declaration of French war aims, 1494; Russian peace terms and, 1551; transport of Czechs to France and, 1903; dispute over Turkish armistice and, 1976.

PICOT, M., Palestine and, 1084-5.

PIERREFEU, JEAN DE, his condemnation of Allied preparations for March, 1918, attack, 1711.

PITT, WILLIAM, 47.

PLENDER, SIR W., drink trade and, 196.

PLUMER, FIELD-MARSHAL LORD, Messines Ridge and, 1248; his plan for Messines attack, 1252-3; informed by G.H.Q. of Belgian coast objective, 1253-4; 1267, 1271; opposed to general offensive, 1271; does not share Haig's faith in Passchendaele, 1310-II; 1315; commands British force in Italy, 1404; might have taken Haig's place, 1672; refuses to become C.I.G.S., 1689; 1738; abandons Passchendaele salient, 1768; 1878; the only commander who inspired real confidence in his men, 2015.

- PLURAL VOTING BILL**, Lords reject, 1164.
- POINCARÉ, RAYMOND**, limitations of, 35; Gallieni plan and, 228; on Somme offensive, 322; Karl's peace proposals laid before, 1181; receives Karl's letter of 24/3/17 to Sixte, 1184; does not wish Sonnino to know of Karl's suggestions, 1186; receives fresh peace offers from Karl, 1191; his hesitations over Karl's peace offers, 1195; 1198; dislikes Clemenceau, 1603; 1604, 1713; Clemenceau and, 1718; Pétain and, 1719; General Reserve and, 1719-20; 1737; Unity of Command and, 1738; on how Foch saved the situation in *March, 1918*, 1739-40; his verdict on Doullens agreement, 1740-1; on Pétain, 1751; Foch and, 1775; Unity of Command and, 2024.
- POKROVSKY, M. N.**, on German peace note, 655-7; his appeal to Allies at Petrograd Conference, 933; on the question of Allied co-operation with Russia, 935; Paléologue writes to him about French annexations 948.
- POLAND**, Balfour on problem of, 525-6; Paris Conference agrees to protest against setting-up of Kingdom in, 572; Smuts and Mensdorff discuss problem of, 1482-3; German attitude to, in *January, 1918*, 1496-7.
- POLICE, FACTORIES, ETC.**, miscellaneous Provisions Acts, Welfare legislation and, 209.
- POOLE, GENERAL**, dispatched to Murmansk, 1894.
- POPE, THE**, *See under* Benedictus XVI.
- PORRO, GENERAL**, at Chantilly Conference, 568; agrees to send Italian engineers to deal with Greek transport, 570; Italian offers of peace to Austria and, 1195; Lloyd George has poor opinion of, 1392; incompetence of, 1396-7; exaggerates enemy's strength, 1400.
- PORTUGUESE TROOPS**, unfair derision of, 1760-2.
- POSIERES**, strength of German fortifications at, 282.
- POST-WAR PROBLEMS**, Wilson on, 1865; Smuts on, 1973.
- "POWER DIPLOMACY,"** America and Britain give up, 1942.
- "PRAVDA,"** 1525.
- "PREUSSISCHE JAHRBUCH,"** 1676.
- PRIESTLEY, J. B.**, 1994.
- PRINGLE, W. M. R.**, the organiser of the attack on the Government over Inter-Allied Council, 1448; Maurice debate and, 1785.
- PROCTOR, CAPTAIN**, advises the sending of 15,000 men to Archangel, 1893.
- PROFITEERING**, problems of, 106; shipowners indulge in, 730-1.
- PROHIBITION**, shipbuilders demand, 194; question of enforcing, 202. [*See also* Brewing, Liquor and Drink.]
- PROPAGANDA, ALLIED**, its powerful influence in Germany, 1873-4.
- PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION**, Speaker's Conference Report and, 1170; Lords fight for, 1173.
- PROTHERO, R. E.** (later Lord Ernle), Minister of Agriculture, 642; food production and, 758; at War Cabinet session on food, 761; obtains the assistance of Lee, 762-3; on the necessity for more home production, 779-80.
- PROTOPOPOFF, ALEXANDER**, hatred of, 943; a propagandist for Revolution, 955; in occult converse with Rasputin, 957; mentally deficient, 965.
- PRUSSIAN MILITARISM**, necessity of smashing, 1485. [*See also* Militarism.]
- PURDY, MR.**, to go to Petrograd, 1119.
- PUTLOFF WORKS (PETROGRAD)**, equipment of, 278-9.
- RABERAU, BARON VON**, on Austrian position in *January, 1918*, 1472-3.
- RACHITCH, GENERAL**, at Chantilly Conference, 568;
- RADCLIFFE, GENERAL P. DE B.**, substitute for Sir F. Maurice, 1782; 1784.
- RADEK, KARL**, on German situation, 1553.
- RADZIWIŁŁ, PRINCESS**, on the cruelty of the Czar, 954.
- RAGENAU, GENERAL**, protests against British demand for trains, 892.
- RAGGI, MARQUIS SALVAGO**, at Paris Conference, 556.
- RAILWAYMEN, NATIONAL UNION OF**, 1147.
- RAINHAM CHEMICAL WORKS**, taken over by the State, 342.
- "RANK AND FILE" MOVEMENT**, activities of, 1148.
- RAPALLO, CONFERENCE OF, 4/11/17**, 1396 *et seq.*; Lloyd George's criticism of Italian G.H.Q. at, 1398-9; Inter-Allied Council's constitution agreed upon at, 1439; Bouillon at, 1602; Foch on Lloyd George's prevision at, 2025.
- RASPUTIN**, warns Court of dangers of War, 34; assassination of, 930; effects of his assassination, 941; his responsibility for Revolution, 953, 955; his influence over Czarina, 956; opposes the War, 956-7; his murder destroys the Czar, 957; publication of Czarina's letters to, 974; Czar's drug habits and, 1521.
- RATIONING SYSTEM**, Lloyd George proposes 630; introduction and development of, 787 *et seq.*
- RAVEN, VINCENT**, appointed head of Woolwich Arsenal, 351, 470.
- RAWLINSON, GENERAL**, General Reserve and, 1715-16; takes over command of Gough's Army, 1733, 1741; in favour of attack in Amiens area, 1868.
- RAYMOND, E. T.**, on Lloyd George's responsibility for Mansion House speech, 27.
- READING, LORD**, financial crisis (1914) and, 63; moratorium and, 67; invaluable gifts of, 68; visits France, 90; 95; munitions and, 97; House's peace proposals and, 411-2; opposed to Lloyd George's resignation, 460; suggested visit to Russia, 461; Asquith and, 599; Russian reorganisation and, 938; American loans and, 1014; sent

- to America, 1018; good effect of his American visit, 1020-1; Northcliffe objects to delay in sending him to America, 1111; his visit to Washington, 1414; 1794; Lloyd George's message of 27/3/18 to, 1814; his report of 27/3/18 on American position, 1814-15; Lloyd George's instructions to regarding appeal to Wilson, 1816-18; Lloyd George's further messages to 1818-19; Allies' debt to, 1819-20; Lloyd George's memorandum to, on immediate use of American troops, 1821-2; advises acceptance of compromise agreement on American troops, 1823; Lloyd George's cable of 4/5/18 to, 1825; 1826, 1827; advises against sending Knox to Russia *via* America, 1906; 1907.
- RECONSTRUCTION COMMITTEE (1917)**, terms of reference of, 1160.
- RECRUITING**, voluntary system becomes inadequate, 427-9; achievements during War, 1561; further measures proposed in *March*, 1918, 1730; miners and, 1774. [See also under Conscription and Man-power.]
- RECRUITING COMMITTEE**, "Householders' Return" organised by, 729.
- REDMOND, JOHN**, Coalition and, 145; pledges Nationalist support for Britain in War, 417; personality of, 420-1; agrees to accept Lloyd George's terms for Irish settlement, 421; Lansdowne's ideas and, 423; driven to repudiate mangled terms of 1916 agreement, 424; Conscription Bill and, 437; his efforts to raise Irish Volunteer Army nullified by Kitchener's prejudices, 452-3; his ideas on Allied War aims, 1510-11.
- REDMOND, WILLIE**, death of, 452.
- REGIONAL PACTS**, President Wilson against 1942.
- REICHSTAG COMMISSION REPORT**, quoted, 1472, 1473, 1475; on *March*, 1918, offensive 1701; 1834-5; on value of Allied Unity of Command, 1836; von Kuhl's evidence on man-power, 1838; Compiègne attack of 9/6/18 and, 1845; on exhaustion of German forces in *August*, 1918, 1871-2; on collapse of Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary, 1911; on loss of Roumanian oil-fields, 1921; on German peace terms, 1932; on Allied offensive of *August*, 1918, 1936; on German prospects in *September*, 1918, 1936-7.
- REPPINGTON, COLONEL CHARLES**, shell shortage and, 123; on comparative British and French losses, 1655; attacks Government on General Reserve, 1670-1; publishes decisions of War Council, thereby betraying Allies, 1674 *et seq.*; Delbrück accuses him of treason, 1676; extract from his diary, 1677; boasts of having published information of value to the enemy, 1678-9; Lloyd George refers to his disclosures in House of Commons, 1682; 1712.
- REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE BILL**, its progress through Parliament, 1173.
- REVELSTOKE, BARON**, British representative at Petrograd Conference, 931.
- RHEIMS**, German offensive east and west of, 1847; Battle of, the end of German Army, 1053.
- RHONDDA, LORD**, Russian war-weariness and, 464-5; 623; President of Local Government Board, 642; Butt's rationing scheme and, 788; becomes Food Controller, 791; food control work of, 793 *et seq.*; 1798.
- RIBOT, ALEXANDRE**, 69; meets Lloyd George (1915), 241; peace notes of *December*, 1916, and, 660; converted to Nivelle offensive, 877; demands British consent to Nivelle plan, 880; his ideas on disagreement between Haig and Nivelle, 887; proposes to husband strength of French Army, 926; personnel of delegation at Petrograd Conference and, 929-30; Palestine campaign and, 1085; discusses Karl's peace overtures, with Lloyd George, 1184-5; agrees not to inform Sonnino of Karl's peace overtures, 1186; at Conference of St. Jean de Maurienne, 1187; prepares formula to be adopted at St. Jean de Maurienne, 1188; sends Lloyd George a statement of verbal message from Karl, 1191, 1193; his hesitation over Karl's offer, 1195-6; urged to take action by Lloyd George, 1196; Lloyd George's letter of 23/5/17 to, 1198; asks Lloyd George for London Conference, 1199; the puppet of the Cambons, 1201; unable to do anything without Italy, 1202; is accused of secret diplomacy and shows correspondence to Sonnino, 1203; answers Karl's proposals six months late in French Chamber, 1204; opposed to Kuhlmann negotiations, 1242; 1603; rhetoric of, 1617; Lloyd George's letter of 6/6/17 to, demanding recall of Sarraill, 1912-4; resignation of, 1914.
- RICHMOND, CAPTAIN**, Jellicoe disdains, 698-9.
- RIGA**, Germans capture, 1223.
- RIPON, LORD**, foreign affairs and, 28, 29.
- RITTICH, A. A.**, Russian grain supply and, 968.
- ROBERTS, G. H.**, to go to Petrograd, 1119; attends conference between Labour and Government, 1593.
- ROBERTS, LORD**, on London's vulnerability in case of attack, 20; 50; external programme of, 445; 1425.
- ROBERTSON, FIELD-MARSHAL SIR WILLIAM**, on strategy, 230; Lloyd George meets, 241; Balkans and, 243-4; on difficulty of forcing German lines, 295; on necessity for activity near Loos in *October*, 1915, 297; made C.I.G.S., 299; allows his loyalty to Haig to dim his vision, 323; on need for heavy artillery, 336; at Hatfield tank trial, 383; premature use of tanks and, 385; his warning on man-power shortage, 438; congratulates Lloyd George on introduction of conscription, 440; displaces Kitchener in authority, 455; jealous of Lloyd George's attempts to reform War Office, 460; 461; invited to go to Russia, 461 *et seq.*; refuses to go to Russia, 463-4; character and abilities of, 466-9; insists that a strong Germany is essential to peace, 467; Geddes and, 473; peace proposals of, 497-503; Lansdowne on his memorandum of 31/8/16, 518; repudiates possibility of stalemate, 521; ascribes many of our misfortunes to Grey's feebleness, 522-3; gives Lloyd George two



memoranda on military position in *October, 1916*, 536-41; his estimate of Roumanian effectives, 549; co-ordination between Allies and, 554; at Chantilly Conference, 568; on position in Salonika, 570; excuses for Balkan inactivity, 573; refuses to represent England in Russia, 581-2; apprehensive lest the means he had adopted to supplant Kitchener should be used against him, 581-2; Northcliffe backs, 587; his estimate of Russian effectives, 617; trusts in attrition, 617; complains of inefficiency of diplomats, 618; his view of situation at end of 1916, 619; Gibraltar convoy and, 693; Balkan situation and, 823; holds false views of German weakness, 825; his indifference to Serbian situation, 831; at Rome Conference, 838; Salonika and, 847; Italian offensive and, 853; influences Cadorna against Italian offensive, 859; his reasons for opposing Italian offensive, 865-6; his strategical principle, 866; his qualities and defects, 870-1; his report on Nivelle's tactics, 876; arranging for 15,000 men to be sent to Salonika, 885; Nivelle and, 886; his attitude to Nivelle plan, 888; strongly resists Lloyd George's Unity of Command efforts, 891; at Calais Conference, 892; objects to Unity of Command, 893; protests against arrangements of Calais Conference, 894 *et seq.*; terms of his objections, 895-6; on Nivelle's dispute with Pétain, 905-6; his reply to Smuts' memorandum of April, 1917, 916-9; his attitude to Nivelle's offensive plans, 917; a strenuous advocate of Nivelle plan at Rome Conference, 920; his statement at Paris Conference of 4/5/17, 925-6; in favour of Pétain's tactics, 927; Petrograd Conference and, 928; why Lloyd George wanted him to go to Russia, 938; permits Maude to maintain an aggressive front, 1075; opposes advance on Baghdad, 1078-9; on the Egyptian campaign, 1081; urges a defensive attitude in Egypt, refusing to reinforce Murray, 1081-4; his memorandum on Palestine campaign, 1083; unable to plan ahead for operations in Egypt, 1086; refuses reinforcements for capture of Jerusalem, 1086; dissuades Smuts from accepting Egyptian command, 1088; recommends Allenby for Egyptian command, 1089; exaggerates strength of forces opposed to Allenby, 1092; 1126, 1133, 1240; considers that collapse of Russia would make victory impossible, 1242; politicians' responsibility for Passchendaele and, 1249; his letter of 1/12/16 to Joffre announcing objective of Ostend and Zeebrugge, 1250-1; Asquith's letter of 21/11/16 to, on question of advance along Flemish coast, 1251-2; anxious to blame Asquith Government for Passchendaele, 1255; urges the French to maintain offensive, 1258; incredulous of French difficulties, 1261-2; Cabinet discussion on Flanders project and, 1272, 1277; has poor opinion of German artillery, 1278; supports Haig wholeheartedly, 1279; replies to Lloyd George's objections to Passchendaele plan, 1287 *et seq.*; convinced of success of Passchendaele, 1288; misrepresents French attitude to Passchendaele, 1294; calls Passchendaele a

"gamble," 1297; his change of view on Passchendaele, 1299; unshaken in his attachment to Passchendaele, 1303; Gough's attitude to Passchendaele and, 1310; would have resigned had Haig been dismissed, 1315; Turkey and, 1332; 1333; qualities of, 1367; his excuse for continuation of Passchendaele offensive, 1367-8; Haig's unswerving adherent, 1368-9; difficulty of dismissing, 1370; practically admits futility of Passchendaele, 1370; asked to examine Italian position, 1373; opposed to sending troops to Italy, 1374; refuses to consider Italian offensive, 1379-80; refuses to break off Passchendaele offensive, 1382; his letter of 17/8/17 to Cadorna, 1382-5; Lloyd George's letter of 26/8/17 to, on Italian Front, 1385-6; Lloyd George suggests he should visit the Italian Front, 1386; Cadorna's note of 29/8/17 to, 1387-9; 1391; agrees to send help to Italy, 1394; visits Italy, 1395; 1397; 1399; convinced of incompetence of Italian High Command, 1399; at Peschiera Conference, 1403; his strategical ideas, 1405; Haig's man, 1407; forces Cadorna to refuse British help, 1407; must be dismissed if strategy is to be changed, 1407-8; terrified of Haig, 1410; his removal would not touch the real problem, 1411; on importance of non-military factors, 1412-3; 1420; his views of situation in latter part of 1917, 1423-4; his poor opinion of the French, 1424; his opinions the same as Haig's, 1424-5; War Cabinet meeting of 11/10/17 and, 1425; his ideas criticised by Lord French, 1427-9; says, "Our Allies must be made to fight," 1432; refuses to discuss Inter-Allied Council, 1440-1; initiates attack on Inter-Allied Council and Lloyd George, 1441; his position in relation to Inter-Allied Council, 1447-8; his friends attempt to overthrow the Government, 1448; unmindful of a change in the facts determining strategy, 1453; countermands order for tanks given by Lloyd George, 1456; his memorandum of 20/6/17, in which he surveys general military position and concludes that there is a strategic warrant for Flanders offensive, 1461-3; his false calculations of the losses to be sustained in Flanders offensive, 1469; Russian situation and, 1531; hoped Korniloff would restore discipline in the Army, 1536; advises following the gambler's principle, 1568; man-power for Passchendaele and, 1569; at Paris Conference of 29/11/17, 1617; Compiègne Conference and, 1627; Salonika and, 1634; at Supreme Council meeting of 30/1/18, 1635; thinks a general offensive impracticable during 1918, 1637; discussions about General Reserve and, 1637 *et seq.*; approves of Foch's ideas for General Reserve, 1638-9; sympathises with French over extension of British Front, 1656; his fall, 1668 *et seq.*; his anger at being left off Board of General Reserve, 1669-70; supported by Colonel Repington and Sir F. Maurice, 1671; had been appointed by Asquith, 1671; Milner on, 1672; to vacate position of C.I.G.S., 1672; hopes to overthrow Government, 1673; had accepted decision concerning

- General Reserve, 1674; had never been in action, 1675; congratulates Colonel Repington, 1679; eulogised by Asquith, 1680; 1683; determined to challenge War Cabinet, 1684-5; choice offered him, 1685; Balfour attempts to make him see reason, 1685-6; attempts to dictate to Cabinet, 1687; the choosing of his successor, 1687-8; 1689; public asked to choose between Lloyd George and, 1690; had not voiced his disapproval of Versailles decisions when they were being made, 1692; personal relations between Lloyd George and, 1693; takes up Eastern Command, 1694; could not overthrow ministers without Haig, 1696; played a more honourable part than Haig, 1708; General Reserve and, 1711-13; 1720; his frown, 1725; his opposition to Unity of Command, 1750; Haig unmoved by his fate, 1784; his memorandum of 18/10/17, 1790; 1796; interviews Pershing, 1805; his view of prospects of American aid, 1806; discusses American position with Bliss and Pershing, 1808-10; 1823; Lloyd George had no personal quarrel with, 2013; assists Haig to intrigue against Lord French and Kitchener, 2018; admits that conscription came through Lloyd George's efforts, 2020-1; his opposition to Unity of Command, 2023; 2031; Somme offensive and, 2036; Lloyd George's objections to Passchendaele and, 2036-7; never saw a battle, 2038.
- ROCHAMBEAU, JEAN**, 1014.
- RODD, SIR RENNELL** (later Lord Rennell), on war-weariness in Italy, 505; Italian situation and, 519; Italian Front and, 1373-4; on effect of Allied victory on Italian Front, 1374.
- RODZIANKO, M. V.**, determined to defy the Czar, 941; a believer in constitutional monarchy, 955; Rasputin and, 957; food-shortage in Army and, 966.
- ROGER, SIR ALEXANDER**, at Ministry of Munitions, 150.
- ROMAN CATHOLICISM**. *See under* Catholic Church.
- ROME CONFERENCE**, origins and objects of, 838; Allied representatives at, 838; text of Lloyd George's memorandum at, 838-45; attempt to co-ordinate Allied strategy at, 849 *et seq.*; Lloyd George urges the importance of Italian offensive at, 849-50; conclusions reached at, 855-7; its value, 857-8; hidden motives at work in, 860; French jealousy of Italy and, 864-5; saves Italy after Caporetto, 1394.
- ROOSEVELT, F. D.**, 56; state-control and, 1143-4.
- ROOSEVELT, THEODORE, II**, 35; congratulates Lloyd George on formation of Coalition, 145; Asquith and, 145-6; European affairs and, 394; attacks Wilson's neutrality, 402; declines invitation to lecture on issues of War, 414-5; admires Lloyd George's attitude to War, 445-6; in favour of American intervention, 977; Wilson and, 978; offers to raise volunteer force, 986; Allied gratitude to, 992.
- ROOT, ELIHU**, 414.
- ROQUES, GENERAL**, Petrograd Conference and, 929-30; Foch succeeds, 1752.
- ROSEBERY, LORD**, Anglo-French Entente and, 1; anti-French attitude of, 3; Grey and, 57.
- ROSNER, CARL**, his description of effect of Mangin's attack from Villers-Cotterets, 1849-50, 1851-2.
- ROTHERMERE, LORD**, 1002; appointed Air Minister, 1113; resigns from Air Ministry, 1113-4.
- ROTHSCHILD, ALFRED M. S.**, makes a gift to nation of his Chiltern Forests, 752-3.
- ROTHSCHILD, LORD**, help given by in 1914, 70.
- ROUMANIA**, great importance to Germany of her oil wells and cornfields, 545; her fate a crucial factor, 548-9; 668; her fall fatal to Russia, 819-20; out of German hands, 1920-1; 2000.
- ROWNTREE, SEEBOHM**, at Ministry of Munitions, 151; made Director of Welfare under Ministry of Munitions, 206; policy of education in welfare adopted by, 206.
- ROYAL AIR FORCE**, creation of, 1113.
- ROYAL COMMISSION ON AWARDS TO INVENTORS**, tanks and, 382-3.
- ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE REBELLION IN IRELAND**, findings of, 424-5.
- ROYAL FLYING CORPS**, pre-War organisation of, 1096.
- ROYAL NAVAL AIR SERVICE**, tank experiments and, 382; development of, 1096-7.
- ROYAL SOCIETY**, appoints a scientific investigations committee, 368.
- ROYDEN, SIR THOMAS**, shipping control and, 727; congestion in French ports and, 739; American confiscation of ships built to British order and, 1010-1; 1013; American loans and, 1019.
- RUDEANO, COLONEL**, at Chantilly Conference, 568.
- RUDSKY**, shell shortage (Russia) and, 262.
- RUMBOLD, SIR HORACE**, his telegram of 11/1/18 setting out de Skrzynski's view of position, 1498-9; Kerr discusses Turkey with, 1504; 1508.
- RUNCIMAN, WALTER**, 88; Treasury Agreement and, 178-9; convinced that Britain could not last out much longer, 408; his ideas on conscription, 432; opposes conscription but does not resign, 437; uneasy about Allied prospects, 508; his pessimistic outlook with regard to shipping, 515-6; predicts complete breakdown in shipping before June, 1917, 578; grain supplies and, 580; attacks Lloyd George bitterly, in a *suppresso veri*, 600; characteristics of, and Kitchener's disappointment with, 639; his shipping forecasts, 670-1; disapproves of Convoy system, 678-9; restriction of non-essential imports and, 723; 723-4; tempers about Lloyd George's proposal for a Director of Shipping, 725; on congestion in the ports, 737; measures taken to relieve congestion, 740-1; his methods contrasted with those of Maclay, 744; his ineffectual

- efforts to restrict non-essential imports, 746-7; attacks Corn Production Bill, 766-7; his views on food rationing, 787-8.
- RUPPEL, FORT, handed over to Germany, 550.
- RUPPRECHT, CROWN PRINCE, 1837; his army still intact, 1844; 1847; menace of his Army, 1850; his Army on defensive, 1853; his reserves withdrawn, 1859; his picture of the state of Army, 1965-6.
- RUSSELL, SIR CHARLES, Carson and, 607.
- RUSSELL, SIR EDWARD, persuades Lloyd George not to resign, 460.
- RUSSIA, collapse of, 261 *et seq.*; original causes of Revolution, 272-3; characteristics of people of, 275; Battle of the Somme and the Revolution, 321; horror with which America regarded Czarist régime, 395-6; Lloyd George anxious to improve condition of Army, 461 *et seq.*; war-weariness in, 464-5; approach of Revolution, 505; Balfour on the danger of weakening, 525; not likely to attempt to dominate Europe (Balfour), 528; decision to hold political conference in, 543-4; lack of discussion on military co-operation with 553; Asquith urges holding conference in, 560; Lloyd George insists on the necessity of supplying munitions to, 562-3; Lloyd George's proposals for a conference in, 563; decision to hold conference in, reversed by military chiefs, 573; food shortage in, 648; fall of Roumania fatal to, 819-20; Smuts on effect of Revolution, 910; Petrograd Conference, 930-7; Sir H. Wilson on state of Army, 938-9; Rasputin's assassination, 941; Revolution of February, 1917, 949-51 *et seq.*; failure of Allies regarding, 952; aristocrats began Revolution, 955; Army chiefs decide to depose Czar, 958-9; Revolution inevitable, 963-4; 968; Czar refuses to consider Duma's proposal that there should be a joint meeting of special conferences under presidency of the Emperor, 965-8; attitude of British leaders, including Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Asquith, to Revolution, 969-71; looking to Britain for help, *March, 1917*, 1054; foreign repercussions of Revolution, 1116; medley of parties in Revolution, 1117; attempts made by Allies to secure continuance of War by, 1117 *et seq.*; telegram to Duma from British Labour, 1118; Soviet invites Allied Socialists to visit, 1119-20; anti-War feeling strong in, 1122-3; chaos in, 1131-2; no longer concerned with Stockholm Conference, 1133-4; effects of Revolution felt in England, 1145-6; Leeds Conference and Revolution, 1153; effect of Revolution on other belligerents, 1206; her impending collapse affects Passchendaele plans, 1256-7; unreliability of, 1263; French Army discouraged by collapse of, 1268; Haig's optimism concerning, 1272-3; Lloyd George alarmed by situation prior to Passchendaele, 1302; final collapse of, 1453; makes peace with Germany, 1514; tremendous importance of Revolution in, 1518; conquered by Bolsheviks, 1518 *et seq.*; fall of Provisional Government due to its incompetence, 1518; position reviewed at Inter-Allied Conference at Paris (*July, 1917*), 1530 *et seq.*; Allied attitude to, after Revolution, 1544 *et seq.*; aftermath of War in, 1885 *et seq.*; way in which Empire broke up, 1886; Allies cannot afford to abandon her to Germany, 1888; Allied military stores in, 1888; Germany's need of, 1889; aims of Allied intervention in, 1891, 1892; Japan anxious to intervene in, 1896-9; Semenoff's anti-Bolshevik activities, 1902; Balfour defines British attitude to, 1906-7; results of Allied intervention in, 1909; Revolution hastened by Allied neglect of, 2033-4. [*See also* Bolsheviks.]
- RUSSKY, GENERAL, in plot to depose Czar, 958, 1410.
- RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR, lessons of, 77, 85.
- SACKVILLE-WEST, GENERAL, Salonika and, 1916.
- SAILORS' AND FIREMEN'S UNION, objects to MacDonald's projected Russian visit, 1124; refuses to take MacDonald to Russia, 1125; offended by Leeds Conference, 1154-6.
- ST. ALDWYN, LORD. *See under* Beach, Sir Michael Hicks.
- ST. JEAN DE MAURIENNE, Conference of, 1187-8.
- SALISBURY, LORD, 60; denounces Irish settlement, 422-3; Unionist War Committee and, 1677.
- SALONIKA, Gallieni and, 228; Lloyd George not alone in favouring offensive in, 229; Lloyd George prefers, rather than Dardanelles, 231-2; Territorials and, 233; *Official History* and, 233; War Office's failure to make preparations in, 235; French attitude to, 242; Sir John French supports offensive in, 244; Lloyd George's appeal for expedition (*22/2/15*), 255; Joffre agrees to assist at, 292; Joffre and, 296; Carson and Law in favour of expedition, 297-8; Lloyd George demands reinforcements in, 303; delay in dispatch of troops to, 306; first troops reach, 311-2; Beresford on, 312-3; withdrawal from, proposed, 314; French angry at proposal to withdraw, 314; withdrawal agreed upon at Calais Conference, 315; decision to evacuate reversed, 316; Army left without equipment in, 317; Lloyd George's reasons for opposing Joffre on subject of offensive in, 320; Lansdowne on, 518; Robertson on position in, 536-7; position in *October, 1910*, 549-50; Briand on, 559; Lloyd George insists on prompt action in (*November, 1916*), 562; Italian attitude to, 564; Lloyd George points out exaggeration in estimate of effectives at, 569; transport problems at, 569-571; Milne on small support given him in, 818-19; Constantine and, 820 *et seq.*; Joffre insists that British troops be sent to, 821; offensive abandoned, 822; Allied disagreements about reinforcements for, 842-3; deadlock over policy at Rome Conference, 845 *et seq.*; French attitude to, 847; shipping shortage prevents sending of reinforcements, 848; Lloyd George asks Italy to improve transport facilities in, 848-9; Haig demands ten divisions from, 884-5; question of abandoning, 911-2; Robertson and, 1384-5; Clemenceau's support of expedition,



- 1620; Haig suggests abandonment of, 1633-4; the most important of the "side-shows," 1911; French troops withdrawn from, 1915; fine condition of Army at, 1917-8. [See also Balkans.]
- SALTER, A. C. (JUDGE)**, Electoral Reform and, 1172.
- SALTER, SIR ARTHUR**, Convoy system and, 688; shipping and, 735; his comments on Shipping Control Committee's Report on restriction of non-essential imports, 746; on measure of restriction and economy, 749-50; American shipping question and, 1012.
- SALVATION ARMY**, liquor trade, and, 204.
- SAMUEL, SIR HERBERT**, unemployment and, 171; is offered post in Government but refuses, subsequently becoming Governor of Jerusalem, 640.
- SANDERS, GENERAL LIMAN VON**, on condition of Turkish Army, 1924-5.
- SARRAIL, GENERAL**, deprived of means of transport, 316; inadequate equipment in Salonika and, 549-50; acts without reporting position, 570; in favour of clearing Greeks out of Thessaly, 822; on his difficulties, 823; Rome Conference and, 838; co-ordination and, 841; his fear of Greek attack, 845; Lloyd George's impressions of, 846; proposes to attack the Greeks, 846-7; his good temper preserved in spite of mean treatment, 847; his authority defined, 856-7; his Greek efforts brought to nought by authorities, 1912; reasons for recall of, 1912-5; 1916.
- SAVINKOV, 1527**; in agreement with Korniloff, 1538.
- SAZONOW, SERGIUS (RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER)**, 33; Berchtold and, 34; his horror at prospect of War, 34; limitations of, 35; accepts proposal for conference in *July, 1914*, 36; Balkans and, 245; leaves Russian Foreign Ministry, 464, 555; Rasputin warns Czar against, 956; 963.
- SCHIEDEMANN, PHILLIP**, 1870; advises Max to induce Kaiser to abdicate, 1981; not a Gambetta, 1982.
- SCHUCH, GERMAN WAR MINISTER**, on effect of loss of Roumania, 1921.
- SCHWERTFEGER, COLONEL**, on German offensive of *9/6/18*, 1845.
- SCIALOJA, VITTORIO**, at Petrograd Conference, 931; Czar and, 949.
- SCLATER, SIR H. C.**, 50.
- SCOTT, C. P.**, suggests services of Professor Weizmann should be used, 348.
- SEA**, campaign on the, the decisive factor, 1451.
- SEA POWER**, the key to ultimate victory, 649-50; Germany realises importance of, 667; 1564; Clemenceau under-estimates importance of, 1608.
- SEAS, FREEDOM OF**, Bonar Law on German interpretation of, 1214; ideas of Vatican on, 1216; Fourteen Points and, 1494; Wilson vague on subject of, 1963; British attitude to Wilson's ideas on, 1979.
- SEIDLER, PRESIDENT OF AUSTRIAN MINISTRY**, on food shortage in Austria, 1473.
- SELBORNE, LORD**, food supply and, 576, 651; his optimism leads him to reject recommendations of Milner's Committee on food, 756.
- SELBY-BIGGE, SIR AMHERST**, educational reform and, 1994.
- SEMENOFF, ATAMAN**, Japan conceives Allies are bound to support, 1902; a Japanese puppet, 1903.
- SERBIA**, Trevelyan's views on, 236-8; her defeat, the most unpardonable of Allied failures, 548; Noel-Buxton replies to Asquith on, 1446; Smuts and Mensdorff discuss future of, 1483.
- SERGE MIKHAILOVITCH**, Grand Duke, Russian munitions and, 264; incompetence of, 266.
- SHELL SHORTAGE**, first signs of, 83 *et seq.*; excuses for, 98; increase in, 99 *et seq.*; scandal of, 112 *et seq.*; debate of *May, 1915*, 138.
- SHERMAN, GENERAL W. T.**, 230.
- SHINGAREFF, A. I.**, Russian position in 1917 and, 966, 968.
- SHIPBUILDERS' ASSOCIATION**, Maclay calls upon for assistance, 726.
- SHIP LICENSING COMMITTEE**, economy measures of, 745.
- SHIPOWNERS**, extensive profiteering among, 730-1.
- SHIPPING**, losses during 1916, 506; Runciman's pessimistic outlook, 515-16; alarm caused by destruction of, 545; Runciman predicts complete break-down in, before *June, 1917*, 578; no ships available to bring wheat to Britain, 580; Admiralty confesses its impotence to save, 581; Lloyd George proposes state control of, 628; Maclay appointed head of department of, 641; submarine menace to, 648-52; Runciman's forecasts, 670-1; position at end of 1916, 672-3; statistics of losses, 708-9; the arming of merchantmen, 713-7; Inter-Departmental Conference on arming of merchantmen, 715; statistics of increase in armed ships, 716-7; War tasks of, 719; Lloyd George suggests appointment of a director of, 724; nationalisation of proposed, 731-3; shipbuilding transferred to Navy Controller, 734-5; problem of relieving congestion at ports, 737-42; Diversion of Shipping Committee, 737; congestion in French ports, 738-9; problem of control and restriction of imports, 742-50; drastic restrictions imposed on non-essential imports, 748; import reductions in 1917, 751-2; "our weakest flank," 722-3; American confiscation of ships built to British order, 1009 *et seq.*; Jellicoe on lack of, 1292; America and, 1798; Britain endangers her safety to transport American troops, 1825, 1830.
- SHIPPING, MINISTRY OF**, Commander Henderson enlists aid of, 688; establishment of, 718-36; achievements of, 728 *et seq.*
- SHIPPING CONTROL COMMITTEE**, set up, 722; director of shipping and, 725; its first report on the restriction of non-essential imports, 745-6; complains that its recommendations are partially ignored, 747-8.

- [See also *Convoy System and Submarine Warfare*.]
- SHOP STEWARD MOVEMENT**, munitions and, 187; active agency in production of strikes, 1146-7.
- SHRAPNEL**, uselessness of, 84; generals' attachment to, 2039.
- SIBERIA**, Wilson on operations in, 1861; reasons for Allied action in, 1896.
- SIEGFRIED LINE**, British overrun, 1880.
- SIMON, GENERAL**, 1528.
- SIMON, SIR JOHN**, visits France, 90; resigns as protest against conscription, 436-7; continues to oppose conscription, 439; his anti-conscription attitude does not split Party, 446; Rothermere criticises his actions while in Air Force, 1113.
- SIMS, ADMIRAL W. S.**, his account of meeting with Jellicoe, 689-90; in favour of convoys, 691; visits England, 996; troop-transport problem and, 1817.
- SINAI PENINSULAR**, cleared by Murray, 1083.
- SINHA, SIR S. P.**, Imperial War Cabinet and, 1029.
- SINN FEIN**, in America, 1016; arrest of leaders of, 1600.
- SIXTE OF BOURBON, PRINCE**, Austrian peace overtures and, 1177; enters into peace negotiations with Karl, 1178-9; replies to Karl's note and meets him in Vienna, 1181; delivers Karl's letter to Poincaré, 1184; does not wish Sonnino to know of Karl's suggestions, 1185-6; Lloyd George's interview with, 1186; his letter of 18/4/17 to William Martin, 1187; Lloyd George's second interview with, 1189; interviewed by Jules Cambon, 1190; receives fresh peace offers from Karl and an invitation to visit Vienna again, 1190; again interviews Karl in Vienna and procures a second letter from him, 1194; has unsatisfactory interview with French, 1195; visits Lloyd George in London, bringing Karl's second letter with him, 1196-8; retires to Isle of Wight, 1200; Paul Cambon cools his ardour, 1201; calls on Lloyd George for last time, 1202; interviews Jules Cambon, 1202-3; refuses to release French from pledge of secrecy about negotiations, 1203; 1375; 1477.
- SKOBELEFF, RUSSIAN MINISTER OF LABOUR**, 1522, 1535.
- SKRZYNSKI, M. DE**, his view of position in *January, 1918*, 1498-9; meets Smuts to discuss peace terms, 1500-2.
- SLAV RACES**, Balfour on the improbability of their becoming too powerful, 527-8.
- SMILLIE, ROBERT**, a sincere patriot, 1774.
- SMISLOVSKI**, regarded as an enemy of progress, 267.
- SMITH, A. L.**, on labour unrest, 1151.
- SMITH, CAPTAIN**, meets Trotsky, 1548.
- SMITH, F. E.** See under Birkenhead, Earl of.
- SMITH, SIR G. ADAM**, his book on Palestine used by Allenby, 1090.
- SMITH, SIR H. I.**, munitions and, 98-9, 112, 150, 151; his memorandum on labour for armaments, 179-80; explains Lloyd George's "Big Gun Programme" to War Office, 332-3.
- SMUTS, GENERAL J. C.**, visits South Wales strikers, 814-5; discusses position on Western Front with Haig, 909; text of his memorandum on strategic and military situation, 909-16; influences Cabinet in favour of further offensives, 920-1; on the moral aspect of inaction, 924; German Colonies and, 1011; character of, 1032-4; attends Imperial War Cabinet, 1036; on sanctions, 1040; on disarmament, 1041; retained in London after Imperial Conference (1917), 1046; refuses Egyptian command on Robertson's advice, and is made a member of War Cabinet, 1087-8; sent to examine situation in Egypt, 1094; examines Air defence questions, 1106 *et seq.*; 1126, 1133, 1272; supports Passchendaele plans, 1292, 1293; 1367, 1387; visits Italy with Lloyd George, 1394; his discussion of peace terms with Mensdorff, 1478-1489; meets Skrzynski to discuss peace terms, 1500-2; his account of inquiry into Turkish position (*December, 1917*), 1504-5; on Man-power Committee, 1576; "no soldier" according to *Official History*, 1576; corroborates Wilson's fantastic report of 25/7/18, 1866; advises concentration on Palestine, 1922; being under the military spell, sees little hope of immediate armistice, 1972-3; 2009-10.
- SNOWDEN, PHILIP** (later Lord), opposes recruiting and conscription, 430, 437; meets Lloyd George, 625; silent on German peace note, 659; pleads that MacDonald be allowed to visit Russia, 1125; on position of Alsace-Lorraine, 1214; 1215.
- SOCIALIST CONFERENCE**, at Leeds (1917), resolutions passed at, 1153-4.
- SOCIALIST PARTY, BRITISH**, "rank and file" movement and, 1148; Leeds Conference and, 1153. [See also under Labour.]
- SOCIALIST PARTY, FRENCH**, send deputation to Russia, 1118-9.
- SOCIALIST PARTY, GERMAN**, desires peace, 1206.
- SOCIAL ORDER, DISTURBANCES IN**, caused by War, 1116.
- SOMME, BATTLE OF**, Kitchener opposed to, 319; French reasons for desiring, 319; meagre results of, 321; *Official History* on, 321; Lloyd George's visit to Front, 322-3; absurd estimates of enemy losses at, 326; insufficiency of heavy guns at, 337; 358; shell supply at, 389-92; Haig's optimism about, 472; 514; Haig on results of, 521; Robertson on, 536, 537; aims of offensive, 546; effect on Army of carnage at, 585-6; a glorious and noble victory (Curzon), 652; Allied generals imagine German morale to have been destroyed at, 825; no surprise in, from British point of view, 834; failure at, weakens Joffre, 868; British losses at, 1205; bloody futility of, 1247, 1259, 2036.
- SONNINO, BARON SIDNEY**, on German peace note, 657; a strong man diplomatically, 824; on Briand's eloquence, 847; on possibility of German attack on Italian Front,

- 851; on proposed Italian offensive, 852-3; bewildered by Cadorna's lack of enthusiasm, 854; Austrian peace negotiations and, 1185-6; opposed to negotiations, 1187-8; his vast ambitions for Italy, 1188-9; unaware of Italian overtures to Austria, 1189; his demands, 1189; 1194; refuses to go to France with King of Italy, 1202; Ribot shows Karl's correspondence to, 1203; his obduracy justified, 1204; not disposed to reply to Vatican peace note, 1218; fears German attack on Italy, 1373; at London Conference of 7/8/17, 1380; 1382, 1394-5; at Rapallo Conference, 1396 *et seq.*; at Paris Conference of 20/11/17, 1617; 1662; thinks Foch's armistice terms too severe, 1956; his fear of Germany, 1978; his proposed memorandum on Italian frontier, 1979.
- SOUTH AFRICA.** *See under Africa.*
- SPA CONFERENCE,** of 14/8/18, peace terms discussed at, 1933-4; of 20/9/18, question of democratic government and, 1951-3.
- SPEARS, COLONEL,** 1283.
- SPECIAL REGISTER BILL (1916),** 1165-6.
- SPRING OFFENSIVE,** 1918, German. *See under March 21, 1918,* German offensive of.
- SPRING-RICE, SIR CECIL,** on the Anglo-American copper dispute, 397-8; on neutrality of America, 403; his telegram "2943," 511; says that President Wilson does not intend to make peace proposals, 512-3; on the effect of Lloyd George's "knock-out blow" interview, 513; on German peace note, 657; his letter of 17/2/17 on situation in America, 984-7; his dislike of, and quarrel with, Northcliffe, 1003-5; modifies his opinion of Northcliffe, 1006; 1010; his letter of 5/7/17 on finance, *inter alia*, 1014-7.
- SPRING-RICE, TOM,** 1004.
- STALIN,** state-control and, 1144.
- STAMFORDHAM, LORD,** 195.
- STANLEY, SIR ALBERT** (later Lord Ashfield), 623; President of Board of Trade, 642; steps taken to speed-up unloading of ships and, 740.
- STANTON, MR.** (Miner's Member), in Maurice debate, 1787.
- STATE-CONTROL,** growth of, 1143-4.
- STEPHEN, SIR H. L.,** teachers' salaries enquiry and, 1991.
- STERLING, SENATOR,** opposes Wilson on arming of merchantmen, 714.
- STERN, MAJOR SIR ALBERT,** Chairman of Tank Committee, 383; tanks and, 1456.
- STEVENSON, MISS F. L.,** 148.
- STEVENSON, LORD,** at Ministry of Munitions, 150; his scheme for area organisation of munitions, 164-5.
- STINNES, HUGO,** 1474.
- STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST CONFERENCE,** proposed by neutrals, 1119; Vandervelde and, 1121; War Cabinet discusses, 1121; decision not to permit MacDonald to attend, 1124-5; Branting revives idea of, 1126; Henderson advises Labour Party to attend, 1128; Cabinet opposed to, 1132; Russian Government no longer concerned about, 1133-4; Labour Party votes in favour of participation at, 1135.
- STOCK MARKETS,** effect of crisis of 1914 on, 62.
- STOKES GUN,** War Office reluctant to approve, 161; lessons of history of, 369.
- STONE, SENATOR,** blocks passage of Bill concerning arming of merchantmen, 987-8.
- STRATEGY OF THE WAR,** 211 *et seq.*; Lloyd George's memorandum of 1/1/15 on, 219-27; proposed attack on north coast of Germany, 222; suggested attack on Austrian Front, 222-4; suggested attack on Turkey, 224-6; complete futility of Western Front war of attrition, 259-60; mobility of Eastern Front, 282; futility of Western offensives, 284, 289 *et seq.*; Allied blunders in, 547 *et seq.*; plans prepared for 1917, 817-24; Danube Front closed to Allies, 818; Balkan offensive scheme outlined at Chantilly Conference, 818-9; Roumanian muddle, 819; conditions of a successful offensive, 824 *et seq.*; Turkey's weakness not taken advantage of, 826; unreliability of Austrian troops, 826; position on the Italian Front (1916-17), 827-8; the necessity for surprise, 829-37; factor of surprise in German advance through Belgium in *August, 1914*, 831-2; factor of surprise in first Battle of the Marne, 832-3; factor of surprise in Dardanelles, 833; factor of surprise in Brussiloff's *June, 1916*, offensive, 833; factor of surprise in Mackensen attack at Gorlice, 833; Serbian invasion not prepared against, 833-4; factor of surprise at Verdun, 834; no surprise in British Somme attack, 834; unexpected elements in German attack on Roumania, 834-5; surprise withdrawal of German line before Somme offensive, 835-6; Lloyd George presses for a combined Italian offensive, 836-7; Rome Conference and, 838-59; Lloyd George's proposals at Rome Conference, 839-43; possibilities of helping Russia, 841-2; Lloyd George on proposed Italian offensive at Rome Conference, 843-4; attempt to co-ordinate efforts of Allies, 849 *et seq.*; Lloyd George refuses to treat military opinion as infallible, 851; Milner points out Germany's success in surprising the Allies, 855; Lloyd George's Italian offensive plan rejected, 858-9; psychological motives influencing, 860-6; Hoetzendorff's plans for Italian offensive upset by Falkenhayn, 861-3; Italian-French jealousy upsets Allied co-operation, 864 *et seq.*; Russian collapse does not affect Nivelle offensive, 873; Nivelle offensive, 873 *et seq.*; danger of persistent opposition to Nivelle plan, 877-80; Nivelle on his plans for 1917 offensive, 881-3; Nivelle explains how Haig could meet his requests, 885-6; time factor in Nivelle's plan, 890; French generals suggest Italian offensive as alternative to Nivelle plan, 900; our cavalry obsession, 903-4; Smuts' memorandum of *April, 1917*, 909-16; British subordination to the French, 914; Flanders offensive urged by Smuts, 915; Robertson on the dangers of inaction, 916-19; Robertson's doubts about Flanders



- offensive, 919; Lloyd George opposes further offensives on the Western Front, but is over-ruled by Cabinet, 921 *et seq.*; Haig on main principles of, 1291; that of 1917, lacking in new ideas, 1405; no change possible without dismissal of Haig and Robertson, 1407-8; that of Allies is non-existent, 1413; Lloyd George's views on, as expressed in letter of 3/9/17 to President Wilson, 1414-18; Government concentrates on unity of, 1449; Haig on principles of, 1465; ought politicians to have meddled with? 2033; German miscalculations in 1914, 2034. [See also under Balkans, Dardanelles, Italian Front, Salonika, Passchendaele, etc.]
- STRESEMANN, GUSTAV**, Clemenceau's attitude towards, 1606.
- STRIKES**, in South Wales, 814-5; shipbuilding, on the Clyde, 1148; prohibited by Munitions of War Act (1915), 1148; engineering at Barrow (1917), engineering, in April and May, 1917, 1149-50; in munition yards, 1281.
- STURMER, BORIS V.**, replaces Sazonov in Russian Foreign Ministry, 464; inefficiency of, 965.
- SUBMARINE WARFARE**, German sinking of neutral shipping, 399; blockade of Britain announced, 400; peril of increasing, 506; brings America into War, 512; impossible to provide an effectual rejoinder to, 516; in October, 1916, 552; Jellicoe on, 576; memorandum from Admiralty on, 579; Germany announces unrestricted, 665-6; Germany first realises importance of, 669-70; simplicity of unrestricted, 674; terms of German announcement of unrestricted, 683; British victory over, the greatest triumph of the War, 711-2; Robertson and Jellicoe agree on the dangers of, 919-20; effect of unrestricted form, in America, 982-3; American shipping kept in harbour by, 987; Ludendorff on success of, 1211; Haig's opinions on, 1272-3; defeat of, the greatest event of 1917, 1458-9, 1470. [See also under Convoy System.]
- SUDAN**, French ambitions in, 3.
- SUEZ CANAL**, defence of, 1080.
- "SUFFOLK," H.M.S.**, at Vladivostock, 1896.
- SUKHOMLINOFF, GENERAL**, appeals to, from Yanushkevitch, 261 *et seq.*; dismissal of, 964.
- SUPREME WAR COUNCIL**, issues declaration on war aims of belligerents, 1497-8; meeting of 30/1/18, 1635-64; resolutions passed on 21/1/18, 1643-9; Clemenceau's first address to, 1650-2; *Morning Post* betrays plans of, 1674 *et seq.* [See also Inter-Allied Council.]
- SURPRISE, FACTOR OF**, part played by, 1301; necessity of, according to Foch, 1856. [See also Strategy.]
- "SUSSEX,"** sinking of, 714; Wilson's note on 980.
- SUTHERLAND, SIR WILLIAM**, assistance given by, to Lloyd George, 148; Lloyd George's "Big Gun Programme" and, 334.
- SWEDEN, KING OF**, is pro-German in sympathy, 464; danger of complications with, 519.
- SWINTON, MAJOR-GENERAL SIR E. D.**, tanks and, 382.
- SYDENHAM, LORD**, appointed to Air Board, 1098-9.
- SYKES, SIR MARK**, Palestine and, 1084-5.
- SYKES-PICOT AGREEMENT**, fatuity of, 1084.
- SYMON, MAJOR**, at Ministry of Munitions, 163.
- SYRIAN OFFENSIVE**, Lord French's ideas on, 1430.
- TALAAAT PASHA**, forecasts a stalemate, 1490; 1505; ready to join the winners, 1505; 1507.
- TALBOT, SIR EDMUND** (later Lord FitzAlan), wisdom and loyalty of, 598; supports Lloyd George, 621.
- TANKS**, Churchill's work for, 370; research work in connection with, taken over by Ministry of Munitions, 370-1; development of, 381-6; premature use of, 385; Passchendaele ground unsuitable for, 1296; favourable battlefield sought for, 1334; their success at Cambrai, 1335, 1456; Robertson countermands order for, given by Lloyd George, 1456; potency of, 1874; Germans admit their effectiveness but fail to produce them, 1874-5; a decisive factor, 1881; their production the work of amateurs, 2039-40.
- TANNENBERG, BATTLE OF**, effects of, 214; 405.
- TARDIEU, ANDRÉ**, his work in America, 1007; Wilson and, 1015.
- TAYLOR, DR. A. R.**, 1796; troop-transport and, 1801.
- TCHERNOFF**, 1533, 1535.
- TEACHERS, SCHOOL**, underpayment of, 1988-9.
- TENNANT, MRS. H. J.**, munition workers and, 206; women's national service and, 808, 810-1.
- TERESTCHENKO, RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER**, grants interview to Albert Thomas, 1122; 1524; thinks Salonika Front important, 1525; indignant at desertion of Cadets, 1532; 1534.
- TERRITORIALS**, Haldane and, 49; contemptuously regarded by Kitchener, 232-3; failure to make proper use of, 233.
- THIEPVAL**, German fortifications at, 282.
- THIRD ARMY**, Byng's mismanagement of, in March, 1918, 1735-6.
- THOMAS, ALBERT**, on Woolwich Arsenal, 160; Russian munitions and, 277-9; explains French attitude towards Salonika, 315; with Lloyd George on visit to Somme, 322; at Boulogne Conference, 329 *et seq.*; 336; on Woolwich inefficiency, 351; given complete control of design, 376; peace notes of December, 1916, and, 660; at Rome Conference, 838; Sarraill and, 846; on Lloyd George's proposal for Italian offensive, 852; surprised that Lloyd George could offer to lend guns to Italians, 853-4; changes his

- strategy in supporting the Nivelle plan, 859; French jealousy of Italy cause of his change of strategy, 865; gives up his faith in the "way round," 877; on Nivelle's tactless treatment of Haig, 896-7; on French attitude to Nivelle, 905; on special mission to Petrograd, 1121; emphasises importance of having Henderson in Russia, 1122; describes to Lloyd George the anti-War feeling in Russia, 1122; his position similar to that of Henderson, 1131; on Russian attitude to Stockholm Conference, 1136; Vatican peace note and, 1217-8; French inferiority in heavy guns and, 1263; a supporter of Nivelle, 1407; Clemenceau unjust to, 1604; on Foch, 1752.
- THOMAS, J. H.**, Curragh mutiny and, 128; condemns conscription, 437; meets Lloyd George, 625; in favour of supporting Lloyd George, but refuses office himself, 662; high cost of food and, 1156.
- THOMAS, COLONEL OWEN**, Kitchener and, 452.
- THOMSON, GRAEME**, American troop-transport and, 1821.
- THOMSON, LORD**, on Roumanian weakness, 324.
- THORNE, WILL**, joins Labour deputation to Russia, 1118.
- TIMBER**, supply of home-grown, 750-4; committee set up on, 751.
- "TIMES, THE,"** defies the censor about the German capture of Amiens, 52; exposes the shell shortage, 120, 123; munitions and, 132; Asquith angry about leader in, 590; attack on Spring-Rice in, 1004; 1005; Northcliffe's letter in (15/11/17), refusing Air Ministry which had not been offered to him, 1110-1; denounces Vatican peace note, 1217; deludes public about Passchendaele, 1318-9; its adulation of Haig, 1319; shocked into sobriety by Cambrai defeat, 1338; quoted, 1443; coldly receives idea of Inter-Allied Council, 1445; changes its attitude to Inter-Allied Council, 1448; 1548; Maurice intrigue and, 1786; 1798.
- TIRPITZ, ADMIRAL VON**, Germany's naval ambitions and, 6; 1594.
- TISZA, COUNT**, opposes war with Serbian Slavs, 217.
- TITHE BILL** (1891), 64-5.
- TITTONI, SIGNOR**, at Paris Conference, 556; on the importance of the Balkans, 561; asks for financial assistance, 563-4; helps generals to avoid committing themselves to a conference, 573; approves Italian peace offer to Austria, 1189; 1194.
- TODLEBEN'S RAMPARTS OF SEBASTOPOL**, War Office had not learnt lessons of, 75.
- TOURNÈS, GENERAL RENE**, on Clemenceau's desire to be Generalissimo, 1718; on War Council of 24/7/18, 1856; 1858.
- TOWNLEY, SIR W.**, labour troubles in Germany and, 918.
- TOWNSHEND, GENERAL**, captures Amara and Kut, 482; advances on Baghdad, 482; besieged in Kut, 482-3; is sent as emissary of Izzet Pasha, 1975.
- TRADE BOARDS ACT** (1918), industrial welfare and, 209.
- TRADE UNION CONGRESS**, at Bristol (1915), Lloyd George's visit to, 185-7; its resolution of 6/9/18, 1943.
- TRADE UNIONS**, Lloyd George pleads for relaxation of their rules, 156; conference of 17/3/15 with, 176-8; insist on the curtailment of profiteering, 181-2; Kitchener and restrictions of, 253-9; denounce conscription, 437; ready to prosecute the War vigorously, 625; defects in organisation of, 1147; rank and file critical of leaders, 1142; 1148; approve Whitley Councils, 1161-2; strength of, 1491; announcement of War aims ends trouble with, 1491-2; man-power questions and, 1587, 1588.
- TRAFALGAR, BATTLE OF**, 713.
- TRANSPORT**, Lloyd George tackles problem of, 460-1; Lloyd George's work in organising, 470 *et seq.*; Geddes takes over, 474 *et seq.*; problems of, discussed at Calais Conference, 892; problem in Germany, 1473-4; importance of efficiency, 1573-4; American difficulties in, 1800 *et seq.*
- TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT OF ADMIRALTY**, transferred to Shipping Ministry, 730.
- TREASURY AGREEMENT**, signing of, 178-9.
- TRENCHARD, GENERAL SIR H.** (later Lord), German air superiority and, 583; his activities after leaving Air Staff criticised by Rothermere, 1113.
- TRENTINO**, the, Italy and, 1285, 1484-5.
- TREVELYAN, SIR C. P.**, opposed to War, 444; supports MacDonald's peace resolution, 1213.
- TREVELYAN, GEORGE M.**, on Balkan situation in *January*, 1915, 236-8.
- TRIESTE**, Lloyd George proposes an attack on, 1285-6; Mensdorff says that Italy has no right to, 1484.
- TRIPLE ALLIANCE**, Grey and, 9; Metternich and, 13-4.
- TROTSKY, LEON**, in New York when Revolution broke out, 953; helps in reformation of Russia, 1519; describes the Cronstadt sailors as the "fighting crusaders of the Revolution," 1533; ruthlessness of, 1535; assists Lenin to seize power, 1540; demands release of Chicherin and Petroff, 1541; revolutionary appeals of, 1541; opens negotiations with Germany, 1541-2; asks working-classes in neutral countries to agitate for peace, 1542; question of British subjects in Russia and, 1548; his proposals for general peace, 1549; two opinions of, 1553; British attitude towards, 1556, 1557; his statement of 3/11/17 on Bolshevik policy, 1559-60; his appeal to Murmansk authorities to co-operate with Allies, 1892-3.
- TRUBETSKOI, PRINCE**, Macedonia and, 237.
- TSERETELLI**, 1536.
- TUDOR, ADMIRAL**, munitions and, 112.
- TUDOR, GENERAL**, his brilliant fight of 21/3/18, 1736.
- TURKEY**, how she might have been conquered, 548; expert antipathy to campaigns in, 646; Smuts defines our aims

- in, 910; Lloyd George on the desirability of conquering, 1050-1; strategic value of attack on, 1069-70; her army in a vulnerable condition 1070-1; railways in Asia Minor, 1072; campaigns against, 1072 *et seq.*; effect of her defeat, 1283-4; Allies' lost opportunities against, 1331; complete defeat of, 1470; 1471; anxious for peace, 1490; Smuts's account of inquiry into position in *December, 1917, 1504-5*; Kerr's account of, 1504-9; suggested offensive against, 1634; Supreme War Council and, 1646; collapse of, 1921-7; Sultan's peace terms, 1950.
- TURNOR, SIR CHRISTOPHER**, on proper cultivation of land, 757-8.
- TWEEDMOUTH, LORD**, Kaiser and, 12; naval preparations for war and, 49.
- "TWENTY-FIVE YEARS"** (Grey), Morocco and, 25.
- UNEMPLOYMENT**, in 1010, 21; fears of, at beginning of the War, 171-2; Samuel's scheme to relieve, 640.
- UNIONIST WAR COMMITTEE**, activities of, 1677.
- UNIONS, CRAFT**, dilution and, 183-4. [*See also under Trade Unions.*]
- UNITED FRONT, ALLIED**, struggle for, 1405.
- UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**. *See under America, United States of.*
- UNITY OF COMMAND**, Lloyd George's struggles to achieve, 623; agreement at Calais Conference, 893; objections of Haig and Robertson to, 894 *et seq.*; Lloyd George urges the necessity of, 920; Robertson suspicious of, 1424; idea acceptable to Robertson if the "command" be British, 1429; Lord French in favour of, 1431; Lloyd George approaches Painlevé on subject, after discovering that Sir H. Wilson and Lord French were in agreement with him, 1435; Lloyd George's ideas on accepted by Pétain and Painlevé, 1437-8; advantages of, 1631-2; achieved at last, 1750; need for, 1791; value of proved, 1835-6; von Kuhl on importance of, 1850; mistakes that could have been avoided by earlier achievement of, 2001-2; Haig's attempts, through the medium of Cooper, to obtain credit for procuring, 2023-6; Foch's acknowledgment of Lloyd George's work for, 2025-6; Lloyd George's struggles to achieve, 2037.
- UNIVERSITIES**, their power in political life, 621; grants to, 1994.
- VALLIERES, GENERAL DES**, head of French Military Mission with British Army, 885.
- VANDERVELDE, EMILE**, has conversations at Stockholm with Socialist belligerents, 1121.
- VARDAR VALLEY**, futile attempt to occupy, 548.
- VATICAN**, suspected of being pro-German, 658. [*See also under Benedictus XVI and Catholic Church.*]
- VENIZELOS, ELEUTHERIOS**, difficulties caused by his Government, 565-6; Paris Conference agrees not to recognise him hastily, 565-6; friendly to Allies, therefore a rebel against Constantine, 820-1; at Paris Conference of 29/11/17, 1617; appeals for help in Salonika, 1620; brings Greece in on Allied side, 1912; his plans frustrated by the French, 1912; value of his troops, 1916.
- VERDUN BATTLE OF**, German failure at, 226; German artillery superiority at, 281; Joffre and, 318; Somme offensive (*June, 1916*) necessary to relieve pressure at, 319; effect of "Somme offensive on, 321; French endurance displayed at, 510; 514; good results of, 546; 668; 801; surprise at, 834; hopes of Falkenhayn centred on, 861; Joffre neglects to prepare for, 868; Nivelle's brilliance at, 873; its significance for the French people, 874-5; bloody futility of, 1247; 1655; German blunders at, 1997.
- VERNANDER, GENERAL**, cartridge shortage in Russia and, 263.
- VERSAILLES TREATY**, Allied reply to German and American peace notes a forecast of, 663.
- VESLE**, Ludendorff withdraws to line of, 1850.
- VICKERS, MESSRS.**, their failure to honour their agreement with Russia upsets all calculations, 266; machine-gun contracts and, 356-7; Maxim gun superseded by product of, 359; Ministry of Munitions orders 12,000 machine-guns from, 362; the effect of their default on Russo-Allied relations, 960-1.
- VICTOR EMANUEL III, KING OF ITALY**, makes peace overtures to Austria, 1189, 1194, 1195; to visit French Front, 1198-9; does not go to France, 1202; Sonnino and Giolitti fight for his soul, 1203; at Peschiera Conference, 1400-4.
- VICTORIA, QUEEN**, 958.
- VILLA, GENERAL**, his Mexican rising in 1916, 988.
- VILLOBAR, MARQUIS DE**, his correspondence with Madrid on Kuhlmann peace overtures, 1232-7.
- VILLARI, LUIGI**, 59; his view of Rome Conference, 860.
- VILLERS-BRETONNEUX, BATTLE OF**, 1770.
- VILLERS-COTTERETS**, General Mangin advances from, 1848; attack from, the turning-point in Allied fortunes, 1850; one of the decisive battles of history, 1851.
- VIMY RIDGE**, capture of, 902, 1279.
- VINCENT, SIR W.**, reports on medical failure in Mesopotamia, 488.
- VINCENT-BINGLEY COMMISSION**, on medical service in Mesopotamia, report of, 488 *et seq.*, 492.
- VITTORIO VENETO**, Italians victorious at, with aid of British troops, 1929, 1977.
- VIVIANI, RENE**, limitations of, 35; strategy of, 228; head of French Mission to America, 995; 1603.
- VLADIVOSTOCK**, Japanese send warship to, 1896; Allied troops sent to, 1903-4.
- WAGES**, difficulties about rates of, 1159.
- WAGSTAFF, GENERAL**, on position regarding American troops, 1810.



- WALCH, COLONEL**, at Boulogne Conference, 329; his views on artillery problems, 330.
- WALPOLE, ROBERT**, 42.
- WAR AIMS**, Lloyd George's statement of, 1492-3, 1510-7; conflicting, 1930.
- WAR CABINET**, personnel of first, 634; adopts plan for Inter-Allied Council, 1438. [*See also under Imperial War Cabinet.*]
- WAR COMMITTEE**, Lloyd George's suggestions for, 587 *et seq.*
- WAR COUNCIL**, appointment of a, 231.
- WARD, JOHN**, Curragh mutiny and, 128.
- WARD, SIR JOSEPH**, at Imperial War Cabinet 1034, 1036; 2010.
- WARDLE, G. J.**, proposes to go to Paris with Soviet emissaries, 1127; supports Asquith's views on peace, 1214.
- WAR LOANS**, 73-4.
- WAR OFFICE**, reactionary outlook of, 75; faults of, in 1914, 78; incapacity of, 159 *et seq.*; obstructs Ministry of Munitions, 171; its policy regarding contractors, 172-3; its neglect of munition production, 308; its view of duties of Ministry of Munitions, 327-8; Lloyd George's "Big Gun Programme" and, 332 *et seq.*; royal factories handed over to Ministry of Munitions by, 338; obstructs shell programme, 343 *et seq.*; its indifference to machine-guns, 359 *et seq.*; neglects to develop machine-gun corps, 364-5; reluctant to adopt new methods, 367; responsibility divided between Ministry of Munitions and, 368; Stokes gun and, 369-70; control of inventions and, 371 *et seq.*; removes military experts from Ministry of Munitions, 373 *et seq.*; delays caused by its control of design, 375; makes a last stand against Ministry of Munitions, 378; its indifference to tanks, 382 1; its tactlessness in dealing with Irish volunteers, 417-18; Lloyd George is offered Secretaryship of State for War, 456-7; his reasons for not wishing to enter, 457-60; Lloyd George accepts the, 460; confusion in, over man-power estimates, 1569; obsessed with rifle-strength in estimating man-power, 1571; underestimates man-power, 1584-5; Lloyd George holds conference at (23/3/18), 1727; its opposition to production of machine-guns, 2020.
- WAR POLICY COMMITTEE**, Sir H. Wilson and 1265; discusses Passchendaele, 1272 *et seq.*
- WAR-WEARINESS**, in 1918, 1467; in Austria, 1477.
- WASHINGTON, GEORGE**, 439, 999.
- WASHINGTON NAVAL CONFERENCE**, Balfour and, 605, 606.
- WATKIN, SIR EDWARD**, entertains Gladstone, 2-3.
- WATSON, SETON**, Balkans in January, 1915, and, 236-8.
- WEBB, BEATRICE (MRS. SIDNEY)**, criticises Whitley Councils, 1160-2.
- WEBB, SIR RICHARD**, against Convoy system, 680.
- WEBB, SIDNEY**, meets Lloyd George, 625; questions Lloyd George on compulsory service, 631.
- WEDGWOOD, COMMANDER J.**, Mesopotamia Campaign Report and, 483; on Indian Government, 492.
- WEDGWOOD, SIR R.**, at Ministry of Munitions, 151.
- WEIR, SIR W.**, 623; Home defence in air and, 1105; becomes Air Minister, 1115.
- WEIZMANN, PROFESSOR**, discovers method of producing acetone from maize and horse-chestnuts, 348; his work for the Jews, 349-50.
- WELLINGTON, DUKE OF**, 230, 1322, 1366, 1329, 1760, 1784, 3424.
- WEMYSS, ADMIRAL SIR R.**, (later Lord Wester Wemyss), becomes First Sea Lord in place of Jellicoe, 700-1; receives German armistice delegates, 1980.
- WEST, SIR GLYN**, at Ministry of Munitions, 150.
- WESTARP, COUNT**, 1229.
- "WESTMINSTER GAZETTE,"** Maurice intrigue and, 1786.
- WETZELL, COLONEL**, on transport questions, 1574; advances attack on French, in preference to British Front, 1699-1700; on British strategy, 1707; pays tribute to British soldiers, 1758-9.
- WEYGAND, GENERAL MAXIME**, Turkey and, 1331; Italian Front and, 1378; 1617; in favour of appointing a Generalissimo, 1629; Supreme War Council of 21/1/18 and, 1649; a very able officer, 1675; Foch's Chief of Staff, 1738-9; Pershing and, 1824.
- WHEAT COMMISSION**, unable to find vessels in which to convey wheat from Australia, 724.
- WHEAT EXPORT CO., INC.**, agents for Royal Commission on Wheat Supplies, 797.
- WHIGHAM, GENERAL SIR R.**, on Kitchener's attitude to tanks, 383-4; Pershing's conference with, 1819; his statement of position regarding American Army, 1820.
- WHITEHEAD, CAPTAIN**, Convoy system and, 694.
- WHITLEY, J. J. H.**, his Reconstruction Committee work, 1160-2.
- WHITLEY COUNCILS**, birth of, 1160-2.
- WHITLEY SUB-COMMITTEE OF RECONSTRUCTION (1917)**, proposals of, 1160-2.
- WIELEMANS, GENERAL**, at Chantilly Conference, 568.
- WILHELM, CROWN PRINCE**, popularity of, 37.
- WILHELM II, KAISER**, naval ambitions of, 4, 6; his annotations to the reports of Metternich on meetings with Lloyd George, 8 *et seq.*; Agadir incident and, 25, 27; unprepared for outbreak of War, 32; his aversion to a European War, 34; his ignorance of situation in July, 1914, 35; requests Czar to cancel mobilisation decree, 36, 38; his indecision, 37-8; anxious to turn

German forces to East, 58; insults Czar Ferdinand, 246; believes that war is the sport of kings, 407; his following in America, 978; irritates Wilson, 979; dismisses Bethmann-Hollweg, 1209; on annexation of Belgium, 1223; 1231; Germany's War aims and, 1494-5; 1594; convinced that War must be ended, 1871; abdication of, 1884; falls ill, 1936; consents to peace negotiations, 1937; compelled to accept Franchise reforms, 1940; his flight, 1945; agrees to Government reconstruction, 1951-2; 1953, 1954, 1967; flees to Spa, 1980; 1981; no leader, 1982; did not want War, 1995-6.

**WILLINGDON, LORD**, his letters to Lloyd George on Indian situation asking for generous treatment of India, 1030-1.

**WILSON, HAVELOCK**, on the courage of merchant seamen, 707-8; refuses to allow MacDonald to visit Russia, 1125.

**WILSON, GENERAL SIR HENRY**, explains Anglo-French military arrangements before 1914, 30; 50; disliked by Asquith, 582; "agin the Government," 609; supports Robertson's view on necessity of taking much greater control over War, 919; nominated to represent Britain at Petrograd Conference, 928; his report on Russian Army, 938-9; on Castelnau's despair over Russian position, 940; the narrowness of his outlook, 942; on the Czar's position, 943; representing British Army at French G.H.Q., 1261; evidence of, concerning French attitude to Flanders offensive, 1265 *et seq.*; fails to keep Cabinet properly informed, 1267 *et seq.*; Haig blarneyes, 1269-70; his warning concerning possible failure of Passchendaele offensive, 1283; Turkey and, 1331; Italian Front and, 1391, 1392; visits Italy with Lloyd George, 1394; at Peschiera Conference, 1403; invited to attend War Cabinet meeting of 11/10/17, 1425; his views on strategy in late 1917, 1431-4; appointed to Inter-Allied Advisory General Staff, 1438; 1440; urges conscription of Ireland, 1601; 1617; against idea of Generalissimo, 1629; Supreme War Council meeting of 21/1/18 and, 1649; General Reserve and, 1669; to replace Robertson as C.I.G.S., 1672; chief adviser of the Government, 1673; 1685; Robertson's dislike of, 1685; character of, 1688-8; his part in Curragh meeting, 1688; the only soldier to appreciate Foch, 1688; his friends in Cabinet, 1689; appointed C.I.G.S., 1690; spirit in which he accepted promotion, 1694; muddles dispatch of note to Haig on General Reserve, 1713; his ambitious nature, 1713; fails to inform Lloyd George of Haig's attitude to General Reserve, 1714; his warning to Secretary for War on Haig's attitude to reserves, 1714; facing both ways, as usual, 1715; Pétain and, 1716; understates gravity of position on 21/3/18, 1726; misleads the Cabinet about situation in *March*, 1918, 1729; at Doullens Conference, 1738; does not wish that Foch should command Allied Armies, 1744; opposes the granting of further powers to Foch, 1746; declares himself in favour of Unity of

Command, 1748; 1763; in favour of retreat to Channel ports, 1770; 1781; gets rid of Sir F. Maurice, 1782; disclaims responsibility for revised man-power figures of 22/4/18, 1784; American troops and, 1809; has interview with Pershing, 1823; falsely estimates German strength, 1838-9; his account of British defence in Aisne offensive of 27/5/18, 1840-1; not optimistic about effects of Villers-Cotterets success, 1857; asked by Lloyd George to report on general position towards end of July 1918, presents a fantastic memorandum, representative of views of G.H.Q., 1857-7; his summing-up of prospects for latter half of 1918, 1860-5; his fears of German operations in the East, 1863; expounds Pétain's strategy, 1868; on position in *October*, 1918, 1882; pessimistic about Salonika, 1918-9; Haig as gloomy as, 1968; suggests occupation of the Saar, 1970; 1971; helps to mislead Smuts, 1973; his diaries reveal him, 2012; Lloyd George unaffected by his politics, 2013; 2023, 2024; appears to have mischievously suggested to Haig that Cabinet did not appreciate his victories of *August*, 1918, 2030.

**WILSON, LIEUTENANT-COLONEL**, British representative with Sherif of Mecca, 1076.

**WILSON, WOODROW**, House and, 394; in favour of neutrality, 395; House writes to, on outcome of War, 395; impartial attitude of, 397; *Dacia* incident and, 399; protests against sinking of *Lusitania*, 401; 402-3; his letter of *August*, 1914, to the belligerent monarchs, 404; anxious for peace, 406-7; proposes summoning of a peace conference, 411; afraid of public opinion, 412; a determined pacifist, 413; must oppose every idea of Roosevelt, 414; rumours that he would try to make peace, 508; England suspicious of his peace moves, 509; Grey and, 511-12; breaks off diplomatic relations with Germany, 512; his policy of peace without victory, 531; his peace notes, 598; 657; points from his peace note of 20/12/16, 659-60; Allied reply to his note of 20/12/16, 661-4; his personal reactions to Allied reply to peace note, 664; German reply to his peace note, 664-6; objects to arming of merchantmen, 714; secures re-election for having kept America out of War, 977; Allied belief in, 977-8; Bernstorff supports, 978; progressive elements support, 978-9; pacific and hesitant, 979; makes no preparations for War, 980-1; his "Peace-without-Victory" speech, 981-2; his detachment from realities, 982; effect of unrestricted submarine warfare on, 983; severs diplomatic relations with Germany, 983-4; suggests armed neutrality, 987; publishes Zimmermann's Mexican note, 989; still hesitant (*March*, 1917), 989-90; declares that a state of war exists, 990; his reasons for entering War, 991; informed of Britain's secret treaties, 999; Northcliffe and, 1002; his half-hearted prosecution of the War, 1008-9; confiscation of ships built to British order and, 1011 *et seq.*; his attitude to Northcliffe, 1015-6; his conversation with Sir William Wiseman, 1017; asks Congress

- to sanction liberal loans to the Allies, 1020; League of Nations proposed by, 1040; Austrian reply to his "small nations" ideas, 1180; his attitude to Vatican peace note, 1218; conceives it necessary to overthrow Germany, 1219-20; text of his reply to Vatican peace note, 1220-2; Lloyd George's letter of 3/9/17 to, on conduct of the War, 1414-8; his belief in Unity of Command, 1443; supports idea of Inter-Allied Council, 1445-6; his note at beginning of 1917 foreshadows the partition of Austria-Hungary, 1480; British support for his League of Nations idea, 1481; announces his "Fourteen Points," 1494; on Lloyd George's Caxton Hall speech of 5/1/18, 1494; 1495; Austrian attitude towards his views, 1498-9; his request to belligerents to state their aims, 1511-2; partition of Austria-Hungary and, 1514; greets the Bolsheviks in *March*, 1918, 1557; objects to intervention of Supreme War Council in political matters, 1557; 1594, 1595; Clemenceau and, 1607; General Reserve and, 1641; 1748; slow to put his energy into War, 1792; decides to send Mission to Europe, 1795; leaves arrangements regarding troops entirely in Pershing's hands, 1814; his belief that it would not be necessary for America to fight, 1815; Lloyd George's appeal of 29/3/18 to, 1816-8; Lloyd George's further appeal to, 1818-9; Balfour and Lloyd George appeal to after Pershing had wrecked arrangements for transport of troops, 1819-20; Lloyd George's arguments for immediate use of American troops and, 1821-2; his decisions rejected by Pershing, 1823; 1828; his limitations as a War leader, 1831; on post-War problems, 1865; his "Fourteen Points," 1881; opposed to Japanese intervention in Russia; 1899; unwilling to intervene in Siberia, 1899; fears Czarist restoration, 1902-3; objects to General Knox, 1906; agrees to Allied intervention in Russia, 1907; enunciates five essentials of peace, 1942; his distrust of Central Powers, 1943; text of first German peace note to, 1953; decides to reply to peace notes without consulting Allies, 1954; his first reply to German peace note, 1956-7; Allied note to, regarding peace negotiations, 1958-9; his programme merely a collection of phrases, 1960; the unprecise character of his pronouncements, 1961; his second reply to Germany, 1962-3; Sir Eric Geddes's report on his attitude, 1963; Ludendorff's attitude towards, 1965; Germany's third note to, 1966; his third reply, 1966-7; Germany's fourth note to, 1967; his last note approved by British, 1971; Turkish armistice and, 1974; his reply to Austrian peace note, 1977; Allies communicate their proposals for a German armistice to, 1979-80; his final note to Germany, 1980.
- WIMBORNE, LORD**, resigns his post as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, 418.
- WINDSOR, DUKE OF** (then Prince of Wales), 42.
- WINFREY, SIR RICHARD**, food production and, 758.
- WINTERFELD**, German Representative, sobs at reception of armistice terms, 1983.
- WISEMAN, SIR WILLIAM**, 1004; advises Foreign Office on American finance, 1017; proposes that a United States Mission be sent to Europe, 1794.
- WITTE, COUNT**, his friendship with Rasputin, 956.
- WOLFF, UMBERTO**, at Ministry of Munitions, 151.
- WOMEN**, part they took in War, 174-5; in industry, 205-6; efforts made to supervise conditions under which they worked, 207; risks they ran in munition factories, 352-4; part played by, in agriculture, 772-3.
- WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE**, War work helps to remove prejudice against, 1165; Speaker's Conference on Electoral Reform and, 1167-8, 1170; Asquith supports, 1171-2; Lloyd George's reasons for favouring, 1172.
- WOOLCOMBE, LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR C. L.**, sent to Salonika, 1915.
- WOOLWICH ARSENAL**, inefficiency at, 77; Albert Thomas on, 160; transferred to Ministry of Munitions, 163; labour shortage at, 185; breakdown of, 350-1; drawing-office congestion at, 367-8; transport problem in, 470.
- WORKMEN'S AND SOLDIERS' DELEGATES, COUNCILS OF**, Leeds Conference and, 1153.
- "WORLD CRISIS"** (CHURCHILL), 259-60.
- WORTLEY'S (STUART) TERRITORIAL DIVISION**, 86.
- WRIGHT, CAPTAIN FITZHERBERT**, his letter on shell shortage, 124-6.
- WRIGHT, PETER E.**, quoted, 1670, 1706, 1711.
- XAVIER, PRINCE**, visits Karl in Vienna, 1181.
- YANUSHKEVITCH, GENERAL**, his appeals to Sukhomlinoff, 261 *et seq.*
- Y.M.C.A.**, liquor trade and, 204.
- YOUSOUPOFF, FELIX**, 1521.
- YPRES, BATTLES OF**, exhaustion of troops in, 24; shell shortage at, 86; first gas attack at, 117; 124; 211; Territorials and, 232-3; machine-guns and, 358; 366, 668, 756; the salient, a death-trap, 1272. [*See also under Passchendaele.*]
- YUDENITCH, GENERAL**, defeats Enver Pasha, 1071.
- YZZEDIN, PRINCE YOUSOUF**, 1184.
- ZEEBRUGGE**, attack on, 701; Jellicoe insists on necessity of driving Germans out of, 1292; 2042.
- ZEMSTVOS**, mobilisation of, 964.
- ZEPPELIN**, Fisher takes alarmist view of, 1096.
- ZIMMERMANN, ARTHUR**, proposes German-Mexican alliance against United States of America, 988.
- ZINOVIEFF, G. E.**, his arrival in Russia, 1522.
- ZITA, EMPRESS OF AUSTRIA**, anxious to stop War, 1175; Sixte urged to visit Vienna by, 1190; Sixte devoted to, 1201.











